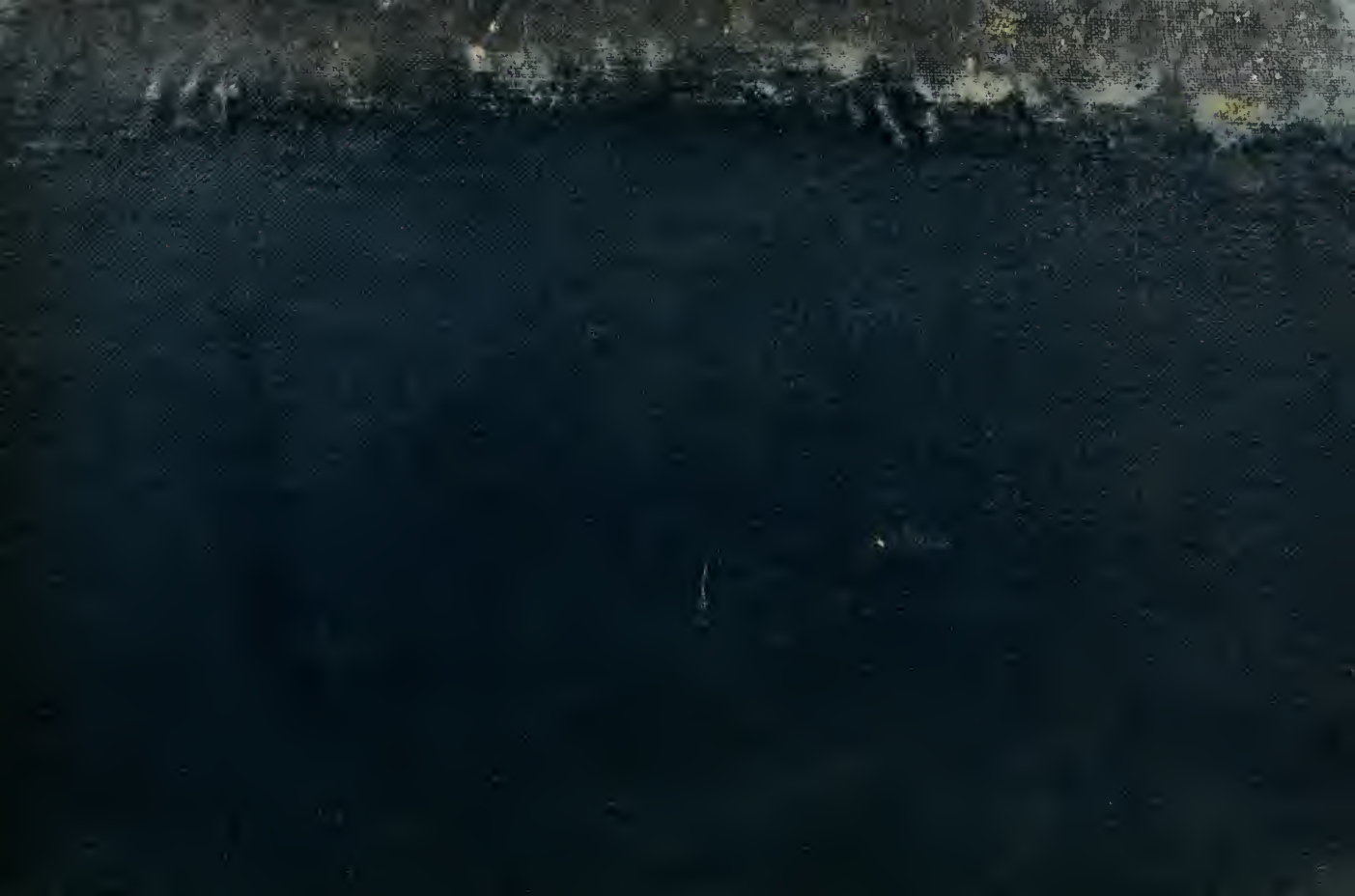

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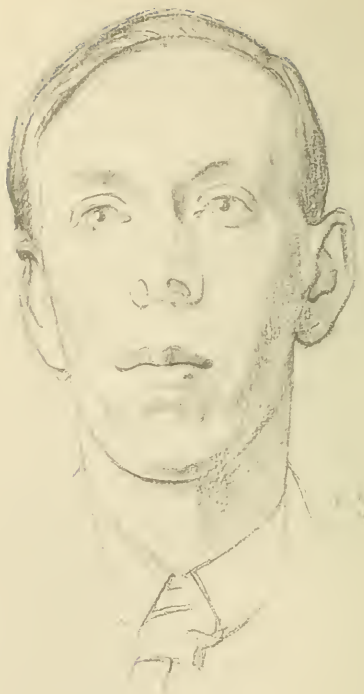
MUSIC

LYRICAL AND NARRATIVE POEMS



From a drawing by William Rothenstein

John Freeman

MUSIC

LYRICAL AND NARRATIVE POEMS

BY

JOHN FREEMAN

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PART I

O MUSE DIVINE

O THOU, my Muse,
Beside the Kentish River running
Through water-meads where dews
Tossed flashing at thy feet
And tossing flashed again
When the timid herd
By thy swift passing stirred
Up-leapt and ran ;

Thou that didst fleet
Thy shadow over dark October hills
By Aston, Weston, Saintbury, Willersey,
Winchcombe, and all the combes and hills
Of the green lonely land ;

Thou that in May
Once when I saw thee sunning
Thyself so lovely there
Than the flushed flower more fair
Fallen from the wild apple spray,
Didst rise and sprinkling sunlight with thy hand
Shadow-like disappear in the deep-shadowy hedges
Between forsaken Buckle Street and the sparse sedges
Of young twin-breasted Honeybourne :—

O thou, my Muse,
Scarce longer seen than the brief hues
Of winter cloud that flames
Over the tarnished silver Thames ;
So often nearing,
As often disappearing,
With thy body's shadow brushing
My brain at midnight, lightly touching ;

O yield thee, Muse, to me,
No more in dream delights and morn forgettings,
But in a ferny hollow I know well
And thou know'st well, warm-proof'd 'gainst the wind's frettings.
. . . Bring thou thyself, and there
In that warm ferny hollow where the sun
Slants one gold beam and no light else but thine
And my eyes' happy shine—
There, O lovely Muse,
Shall on thy shining body be begot,
Fruit of delights a many mingling in one,
Thy child and mine, a lovely shape and thought:
My child and thine,
O Muse divine!

MOON BATHERS

Falls from her heaven the Moon, and stars sink burning
Into the sea where blackness rims the sea,
Silently quenched. Faint light that the waves hold
Is only light remaining ; yet still gleam
The sands where those now-sleeping young moon-bathers
Came dripping out of the sea and from their arms
Shook flakes of light, dancing on the foamy edge
Of quiet waves. They were all things of light
Tossed from the sea to dance under the Moon—
Her nuns, dancing within her dying round,
Clear limbs and breasts silvered with Moon and waves
And quick with windlike mood and body's joy,
Withdrawn from alien vows, by wave and wind
Lightly absolved and lightly all forgetting.
An hour ago they left. Remains the gleam
Of their late motion on the salt sea-meadow,
As loveliest hues linger when the sun's gone
And float in the heavens and die in reedy pools—
So slowly, who shall say when light is gone ?

The roaming sheep, forbidden to roam far,
Were stayed within the shadow of his eye.
The sheep-dog on that unseen shadow's edge
Moved, halted, barked, while the tall shepherd stood
Unmoving, leaned upon a sarsen stone,
Looking at the rain that curtained the bare hills
And drew the smoking curtain near and near !—
Tawny, bush-faced, with cloak and staff and flask
And bright brass-ribb'd umbrella, standing stone
Against the veinless, senseless sarsen stone.
The Roman Road hard by, the green Ridge Way,
Not older seemed, nor calmer the long barrows
Of bones and memories of ancient days
Than the tall shepherd with his craft of days
Older than Roman or the oldest caveman,
When, in the generation of all living,
Sheep and kine flocked in the Aryan Valley and
The first herd with his voice and skill of water,
Fleetest of foot, led them into green pastures,
From perished pastures to new green. I saw
The herdsmen everywhere about the world,
And herdsmen of all time, fierce, lonely, wise,
Herds of Arabia and Syria
And Thessaly, and longer-winter'd climes;
And this lone herd, ages before England was,
Pelt-clad, and armed with flint-tipped ashen sap,
Watching his flocks, and those far flocks of stars
Slow moving as the heavenly shepherd willed
And at dawn shut into the sunny fold.

THE EYE

It is not true that eyes
Save in the trembling eyelids' fall and rise
No meaning have. Did Eve
Hide in dull orbs the Snake's guile, and deceive
Adam with innocent stare?
When David saw how Bathsheba was fair
Burnt in his eyes no fire?
Marked not the men-at-arms his flushed desire
Sudden and swift upbrim,
That not the falling eyelids' cloud could dim?
And when Prince Absalon
Hung by those fatal locks, and help was none,
Under the nerveless lid
How could his father's agony be hid?
He heard the whisper, heard
The hushing, the renewed whisper, the one word:
And then was seen such gaze
As between madness and first wild grief sways,
Till "Absalon!" and no sound
But "Absalon, my son, my son!" crept round.
It is not true that eyes
No meaning have but in the lids' fall and rise.
I have seen terror leap
Up from the spirit's unfathomable deep,
Through unfixed eyeballs stare,
Then shuddering sink back and lie snake-like there.
I have seen honour look
Swift under candid brows, when all else shook,
Pouring in warm light through
Eyes that from inward vision their seeing drew.
And I know the fluttering look
That first love flashes like a bird o'er a brook . . .

No lid so quick as to give
Speed to the glances that with lightning live.
And I know how the eyes,
Nameless, look on me out of clear dawn skies
And eve's unshadowy light—
Clear lidless eyes of pure immortal sight,
Sweeping the million dew'd
Hill pastures and reluming the green-caved wood.

MAY EVENING

O BIRDS, sing on !
Eve falls but slowly, and the silver East
As yet dims hardly in night's nearing breath.
Sing on, sing on !
Your notes flow full and round from the gold West
And yield what only in music is expressed :
Whether of joy or sorrow,
Or of the primal ecstasy that swells and falls beneath
Sorrow and joy.
Sing on—to trees and meads and streams entranced
That stay unbreathing ere Time sighs, Begone !
. . . As then they stayed, on the eye of that great morrow
When first the Morning Stars delighting danced
And the bright angels—man, woman, girl and boy—
In sunny beams arrayed and amber mist
And woodland green and meadow amethyst,
New-visioned sang for joy.

FLOWERS

This June evening sky
Blooms with such lovely flowers
As earth in happiest hours
Had wished for hers.

The west wind all day
Sent white clouds after white,
But evening's rarer light
Makes beauty more.

Budded in high cold air,
These evening flowers die
As in an Arctic sky,
So soon as born :

Soon as a happy dream,
Or blooms that water shakes
And as it makes unmakes ;
They brighten, fade.

Then for their season too
Starred is the aery mead
With flowers of heavenly seed,
Blue, yellow and white.

UNDER THE WILLOW

Thy hot brow plunge into this shady pool
Where June and noon lie cool.
The willow fallen across the water makes
A double bridge and shakes
Her few green leaves that multiply the stir
Of faint and dying air.
Thy fingers trail 'mid slow-waved willow leaves
As the bough sinks and heaves,
And now look deep in the pool's trembling breast . . .
Never was lover pressed
To bosom sweeter with reproachless love.
Scarce may her light breath move,
But lips and breast and lids are satisfied
When thine towards them slide
And soundless past long leaves and shadow sink,
Under the crumbling brink
Where the faint light turns dark, and useless eyes
Lament not earth and skies.

THE WILL

'Twas in my will
That fays should meet and dance
Round and round
The new-greened mound
That holds my unaccustomed bones.

Come from the hill
You green-girt fays,
Moon lieges all ;
Leap over weedy stones
Where the stream drags and frets and moans.
'Tis in my will
That when my body's days
Are done
(So soon the body's days
Are done !),
You then, moonfolk,
Night children all,
Shall run and lightly dance
Around my wasting bones.

O dancing folk,
Fear not, fear not !
Was never sound that woke
The bones once dead.
Fear not, fear not
But I shall hear
Your feet, and in my head
Quivering feel
The shadows and quick thunders of each heel
As you dance near . . .
'Tis in my will

That you shall run and dance,
While I shall lie
Quivering for all reply,
Teased by your light-foot minstrelsy.

You green-girt fays
Fail not, fail not ;
Leave now your secret places,
Each hawthorn bower,
Each shade of bent and flower ;
Come with gay, careless faces.
For I have sown
Such prayers beneath your trees,
Have paid due vows in solemn tone
And whispered low
Where'er you go
Dancing unwatched at ease.
Fail not, draw near
Ere night hours flow,
Or these dry bones will wake,
And gathering strength from lonely fear
Out of the green mound break.

As of children five,
All dear—of Mary, Janet, Lucy, Tom and Dick—
There's one a little more
Than dear, a richer trouble than the rest,
Sweeter for joys and agitations sick ;

And as of women one
Is loved than all most lovely women more ;
As even Solomon of his score-score
Dusk concubines remembers one who wore
The shape that only dreams had shown before :—

So I of trees,
Of Elm and Oak and Beech and Ash and Yew,
And all the breathing rest,
Give my wide-branchèd heart to one that with it grew.
The loud autumnal winds their noise subdue

Upon her breast,
The low skies droop and huddle upon her breast,
The brief-seen stars glitter upon her breast
At rest.—But which that tree
Of the five trees is known to her alone, and me.

LAST THE ACACIA

Last the Acacia. Lilac had long withered,
The Chestnut fallen his majesty of flower
And now at eve gloomed darker ; and Laburnum
Waned, and her dewy flame was chill and dry.

And slowly burned the Hawthorn's heart away
With changing hue, dense leaf and staling sweetness.
Last the Acacia, foam-white as falling water,
Paused in its falling, fresh in the fading hour.

When other hue and smell had waxed and withered,
And embers of late sweet were sunk in sour,
And denser leaves bloomed darker shade, the Acacia
Last brightness hung all down the smouldering sky.

BLACK POPLAR-BOUGHS

Black poplar-boughs are bare, and comb
With their sharp spines the stooping cloud.
Rain falls in gusts, like the torn foam
When the west wind is loud.

The heavens stoop low and, broken, sweep
Still with rough seas the watery meads,
And shake long furrow-pools where sleep
The slowly rotting seeds.

Not Cornwall's cliffs more bold that take
The mass and number of the seas,
Than boughs that comb swift heavens and shake
Rain upon rainy leas.

IN THAT GREAT AIR

In that great air the steeples tossed and swayed
Like sails upon the waters of the wind,
And that tall tower was but a purple shape
A moment poised cloud-like 'mid fainter clouds.
Time, pacing vast from the world's watery edge,
Lean and dark-visaged, satyr-hoof'd and fell'd
With winter, eyes of youth and hands of age,
Time breathing wind and cloud had breathed upon
Earth of corruption, water of sullied curd;
His breath it was that rocked the sparry steeples,
Lifted the purpled tower and—slow subsiding—
Blinded with darkness every beamy hollow
Until the sun had gone and stormy hues
Died after struggling burial in the west.

Then breathed he gentlier, and the burial shades
Drooped from the height now paced by watching stars:
I watching too beneath them moved.
And Venus
Streaming the dark with light sprang up and touched
My eyes, my lips, my nervous leaping heart,
While other stars before her shining crown
Their crownlets vail'd. But still I looked, amazed
Beyond abashing. 'Neath wide brows her laughter
Shone: how the ruddy nipples with her speed
Were shaking on her breast like robins tossing
In the wind on slender thorns. "Shake not at me,"
I entreated, "that round lure of other loves!
Cloud with thy hair the trembling light that hangs
How lovely round thy limbs; and let thine orbs
Relumed and tender shine and shine alone—
Bright in thy heavenly course, I dark in earth's

Following thy beam and happy in the kiss
Of light on darkness, passion on passion falling
Quickening and quickened."
But a ruining wall
Rose between Venus and my smarting sight ;
Lamps flickered from the panes. If yet she laughed
And bared her bosom to me, and her eyes
Renewed with love sweeping the few brief miles,
I did not know. Ruining, the wall rose high
And pale lamps flickering through the rainy panes
Wantoned with shadows.

THOU HAST THY WILL

Thou hast thy will, O raptured lover.
Hold her so long as thy will last—
A year, a moment ; and when past,
No longer seek to hold her fast.

Bosom to bosom, let thy lips cover
Protesting words, delaying sighs.
While thy will lasts, absorb her eyes,
Soothe her quick ear with softer lies.

Hast, then, thy will, O raptured lover ?
That silence, the responsive heat
Of flowing side and trembling feet,
Is this thy will, so soon complete ?

No ! Even though thy drooped head cover
Her head, a low voice breathes : " Refrain ! "
Her breast sinks, cold is every vein,
From hers falls thy cold hand again.

Hast thou thy will, O raptured lover ?
There when gray morning bares the hill
Between old woods, and waters spill
From step to step, thy heart fulfil.

Green branches there thy body cover,
Grass fingers tangle round thy feet ;
'Tis water's voice, so clear and sweet,
And shadows cool that part and meet.

It led us under willows whose dusk roots
Dreamed of the dwindled waters, and dull alder
Listened in vain for those quick syllables
The stream had babbled once, now near forgotten
In this thin whispering of shallow crystal
Frail as grasshoppers heard across the meadow.
The path was cool as water though no blossom
Lingered of all the starry spring's—anemone
Or primrose, violet, bluebell, kingcup, daffodil;
And like the sod of flowers, the air of music
Was for a while all empty though the quarrel
Of voices by quick scurrying jays was scattered
Down on the silent wood.

It led us under
The same low tangling thicket and drooped willows
As once; but then the stream within our bosoms
Poured full and loud, and no reflected branches
And idle cloud—white dreams of things forgotten—
Quivered as now if the mind breathed but softly
From far cool hills down through the watery valley.
. . . . The same full green, and tender willows trailing,
But in our hearts thin voices choiring distant
" Return—regret—remember—and restore ! "
O hush, vain waters, and regret be voiceless.
Can I remember youth and not remember
The smell that rises from this year's wet violets,
And notes from the dew'd hedge shaken wild and shaking
Music from those old boughs where the heart's hidden
Dreaming of things forgot, things yet to be ?

But if I walk the woodland path now, stretching
My hand out, into yours unseen it falls,

Feeling your cool soft palm like spring's fresh grasses,
Quick with new life ; and every wanton blossom
Revives within me, and April's sudden flushing
Turns that rich " then " to richer sweetness now.

THAT LOVELINESS IS YOURS

THAT loveliness is yours
Of a remembered or new-dreamed dream. . . .
Rise the green hills, the towering trees,
And singing creeps the hidden young hill-stream.

Dark-plumèd villages there
Puff their thin smoke into the skies ;
Draw from the harbour tawny sails ;
Half heard, half dreamed ascend the boatmen's cries.

Wings from cliff nests
Fly and return and fly and return.
So seeing, remembering, imagining,
All that is mortal in loveliness I learn—

The smoke, the flying
Seasons of full-leaved green and brown,
The unresting birds, the unresting men,
All living, and all like dead leaves whirling down ;

Leaving but nakedness,
And the wind droning desolate notes.
Only the elemental voices now,
Perished are all the singing and flying throats. . . .

No, no ! The eternal stream
Steals yet from stair to mossy stair,
Quiet-footed, creeping and falling, creeping and falling,
Singing serenely a young immortal air :

Stream that unaging age
Has deepened in the hills' dark defile !
—'Tis even such loveliness you bear,
Lips parted, grave words flowing from your faint smile.

KNOCKING AT THE DOOR

GREAT winds may blow now
But I will go now
Down to her cottage on the shore,
And drawing near her
I shall hear her
Singing as I knock at the door.

Blow high or low then
The winds, I shall know then
She's happy when I hear her sing.
Then at my knocking
The quick rain mocking
She'll pause, and to her wild heart cling.

And I shall stand there
In the blown sand there,
Listening as she listens too,
And the dark fir-trees
And autumn bare trees
Hush, then shake their bones anew.

I knock again and
Again like rain and
Softly as rain, till she laughs to hear.
" I thought it was rain-drops
That when the rain stops
Patter the pane with tapping clear."

—In, in, in now!
There's fire within now,
And a voice whose song is heard in speech . . .

But if that knocking
Were the rain's mocking
And she opened but to an empty beach ;

Or if that singing
Were but the wind's ringing
Faint senseless bells hung in my brain ;
How would the night then
Lack all light then,
And she and I each listen in vain !

LET ME IN

Let me in, let me in!
O, I have seen, I have heard
At my window something strange
Threatening ill.
—Cease, fear nothing. 'Twas a bird
Bewildered on your window sill.

Wings it had, wings it had,
And yet no bird such as sings
In the coppice, and no owl
Flapping soft.
—It was the cherry bough that swings
Between your window and the loft.

But I saw, but I saw
Eyeless eyes that looked at mine
Under brows bushed and gray,
And gray hair.
—It was a phantasy of thine
Frozen a moment on the air.

The eyes stared, and they stared
From the dark into the light,
And I stared back at the dark
As they stared.
—Some old spirit from Death's night
Haunting the roads where once he fared.

He was blind, he was blind,
Nothing gentle in his guise:
'Twas as if Time looked at me
Threatening ill.

—What to you is Time ? He lies
Far-off, by the ice-locked mill.

Who was it then, who was it then ?
Was it cold Eternity
Snatched from the grave the face of one
Newly dead ?
—Put out the light, lie close to me :
'Tis cold, cover your breast and head.

TO END HER FEAR

Be kind to her
O Time.
She is too much afraid of you
  Because yours is a land unknown,
  Wintry, dark and lone.

'Tis not for her
To pass
Boldly upon your roadless waste.
  Roads she loves, and the bright ringing
  Of quick heels, and clear singing.

She is afraid
Of Time,
Forty to seventy sadly fearing . . .
  O, all those unknown years,
  And these sly, stoat-like fears!

Shake not on her
Your snows,
But on the rich, the proud, the wise
  Who have that to make them glow
  With warmth beneath the snow.

If she grow old
At last,
Be it yet unknown to her; that she
  Not until her last prayer is prayed
  May whisper, "I am afraid!"

THE BREATH OF SWEET

Now did wallflower breathe
Where most was Eden wanted. Clear and sweet
It sprang out of her breast upon the air,
Like a bird flying beneath
High white clouds where
The blue floats in a broken cloud amid the white.
Now did wallflower breathe,
As if the earth in sudden sweet
Poured out passionate heat.
. . . Or smell or bird that from her bosom leapt
Where the deep-glowing petals slept
Upon her bosom's heat:
Or bird or smell it was some heavenward thing
Flying a sudden wing
Across the morning hour, making the fair more fair.

O, if but wallflower breathe
Its sweet unaging and intense,
Then if death neared her (as I passed her) blind,
The smell might thrill his nerves with sight and make him
a little kind.
—But no! No earthly and no spiritual sense
Would stir and make him less than death
Or less than blind;
Though in her bosom wallflower burned with sweet
His cold shade beneath.

I HEARD SWEET VOICES

I HEARD sweet voices waking in the ivy
And in the hazel ha-ha and the eaves,
And first the robin, then the blackbird, then
The starling shrill
And sparrows all the long day never still.

Beyond the cherry orchard a cock screaming
Flapped a triumphant wing, waking from dreams.
A victim hen cluck-clucked ; then silence fell
Sweet as the notes
Shaken on innocent air from all those throats.

Then the wind in the trees began his rustling,
Stepping from bough to bough and hedge to hedge,
And all the hooded nodding green heads stirred,
Repeating each
To other their scarce intermitted speech.

I knew, but could not their quick syllabling
Into slow words translate ; but had I wings
To bear me in among their thickest boughs,
And blackbird's song
Or wren's, I might repeat it without wrong ;

Upon a dew'd branch of yet smell-less hawthorn
Listening, into my song their song would slide.
But when the wind passed and full silence followed,
How should I tell
Of the serener air that rose and fell

Quiet as sleep, while the wind in the trees still nested,
A soft-wing'd bird dreaming on songs unsung,
When all that moved was pure light in the East
And shades that thinned
But slowly while yet paused the dreaming wind ?

CHESTNUT BUDS

How sweetly in the chestnut boughs the air
Fluttered, while the buds slowly shook out leaves.
How lightly did the leafless elm tops stir,
How brief the shadows over the unmown grass,
And all was youth and sweetness everywhere.

And girls with young men through the soft grass brushed
While hand and eye and lip of sweetness spoke,
And every shadow passed and sound was hushed
Till only thought spoke ; and the warm March wind
Moved and the wood's thin cheek with beauty flushed.

Earth's breast was trembling, all that breathed grew tender.
And where the trees were darker and none went,
I saw swift shapes of men and maidens slender,
Their dewy limbs gleaming upon the grass,
And clear light falling between with sudden splendour.

How many springs within me had grown cold,
Visions as lovely come and gone forgotten !
Now once again did chestnut buds unfold
And shadows passed, and youth walked in a dream,
And I alone who looked and joyed was old.

THE BUBBLE

DARK, dark, dark the wood, and like a bubble the sky
Floating above ; the wind moved with quick step and shy.
The little light that slanted through the green
Was wrapped in shadow and all was dimly seen.
Dark, dark the wood ; the wet moss on the knotted root
Was unguessed save by the softly falling foot,
Or by the hand leaned on its cold-dew'd breast
Where steep the path was and the pulse called Rest.

. . . Dark and yet darker ; and here the beech dome
gloomed
Shadowless, for no ray like a white flower bloomed
Nor golden bud spotted the ebon deep ;
Here the wind slept, here might even passion sleep,
Self-weary and afraid, and no more wake.
Sleep, then, wild passion, let thy torn bosom shake
No more.

All night the wood in starless dream
Will slumber, undistressed by the slow moon beam.
So slumber thou. I leaving thee will grope
Up the hill's bosom, or down the tangled slope
Emerging amid the broad mead where the sky,
A star-specked bubble, turning as it rises high,
Is caught and shaken by that dark forestry.

NIGHT AND NIGHT

The earth is purple in the evening light,
The grass is graver green.
The gold among the meadows darker glows,
In the quieted air the blackbird sings more loud.
The sky has lost its rose—
Nothing more than this candle now shines bright.

Were there but natural night how easy were
The putting-by of sense
At the day's end, and if no heavier air
Came o'er the mind in a thick-falling cloud.
But now there is no light
Within ; and to this innocent night how dark my night !

"Who—who?"
The note falls hollow through
The windless night.
"Who—who?"
As though a soft owl flew
Near and withdrew
With "Who?" and anew
"Who—who?"

"I—I!"
Across the glittering dew
In the moonèd night.
"Who—who?"
What shadow was it flew
Near and withdrew,
Hearing my quick reply,
"I—I!"

"Who—who?"
The moon upon starry dew
Pours shade and light.
"Who—who?"
While dawn's chill graying hue
Hushes the false owl's "Who?"
And my unheard reply,
"I—I!"

FLIGHT

The brown leaves chase each other like young girls
Whose bosoms yet are thin and footsteps light,
And voices—no ! The leaves are dry and not
Such music speak as girls who chase each other,
Then, when the wind fails in their blood, close-grouped
Like the blown leaves, stand talking, laughing, singing.
Yet once the leaves a lovelier music made
When May winds fluttered in their thickening cloud.
That music died with autumn ; wind after wind
Chasing, month after month, with drier note
Now some rot in the earth, some on the stone
Still dance or melancholy step and quaver—
Like an old woman muttering to herself
" Cold, Cold ! " though the bright flame chases the smoke
Into the chimney, February after January
Runs, spring chases winter, new leaves shake
Dew upon old leaves, star follows after star.

THE YORKSHIRE HOUSE

I

He came before the sun was risen up,
And the long grass was wet and celandine
And cowslip and close-hooded buttercup.
He crushed them as he came, and gave no sign

That he saw dew or grass or flower or cloud,
Or heard the wind or felt its waking breath.
With shoulders stiff, cloaked head intent and bowed,
He crossed the meadow and strode up the path.

Older the stone walls were than any trees
Around, and stronger than the broad-breasted oak ;
The house rose as a rock and slept at ease.
He listened, but no sound the stillness broke.

He pressed the door : it opened and he stepped
Quietly in the quiet of the house—
Almost as slowly as a dial-hand crept,
Then by the small bed stood. . . . But dared not rouse

The sleeping child, not daring what he would :
His arm hung stiff and cold, lingering there,
Knowing his strength all strengthless, as he stood
Caught like an icicle in a still frore air.

Suddenly and hastily he turned away.
His shadow strode before him on the grass
Flung down by the first brightness of the day,
And crushed flowers rose before his feet could pass.

II

He came when June's high-clambering flower was dew'd
And heavy and the woodbine, yet unclosed,
Shone moonlike 'mid its cloud—each night renewed
In whiteness ; and again the stone house drowsed.

No one was stirring, though the stir of years
Had a little deepened the broad doorway stone
With many footsteps. But now nothing stirs
Except the cherry boughs tossing up and down.

Softly he moved and stood beside the bed
Where he had stood thirty long years before,
And moved his lips—in vain : no word was said ;
Lifted his hand—in vain : it had no power.

The sleeper slept on. Then that figure went
Heavily from the house into the light
That washed the stone and on the mosses bent
Green bows and gold ; but his eye shrank from sight.

The purple shadows bloomed on the caved hillside,
Then dimmed away because the sun was up ;
The narrow valley cleared, grew bright and wide
With full green quivering in its crystal cup.

III

When next he came the roof was bent and black,
And cloud was bent low over hoary green ;
And half bare boughs would rattle and thrash and crack,
And the house stood infirm and aged and mean.

Red creeper leaves and golden beech leaves, drifted
From the high copse, lay with their splendour mingled—
The last splendour of the year ; the jasmine lifted
Its warm green bosom that with the frost-wind tingled.

An elm had fallen in the hedge, and lay
Long after in the crushed hedge where it fell ;
An unhinged gate flapped noisily night and day
In any wind against the orchard wall.

He saw it all and hastened to the door :
The worn fine moulding here and there was broken,
The latch slid easily ; the once firm floor
Groaned at his foot with all of age unspoken.

He saw a grey head pillow-propped, and heard
Hoarse breathing ; then he raised his hand again,
And his lips moved—but still there was no word ;
The sleeper slept on 'neath a gesture vain.

IV

Then he returned when February's flood
Had made a hundred runnels where was none.
The leaden road shone with its sliding mud
In the white light that hinted prisoned sun.

Last Autumn brambles tangled round his feet,
Every long bough unburdened its wet gems ;
Except the white light there was nothing sweet
More than the intertwisted jasmine stems.

The gate lay in the grass. The path was hidden,
Green strangled green in the garden everywhere,
And in the orchard swept on unforbidden.
He saw a starling from the window stare.

Was every window eyeless, and the roof
With two great black holes yawned, as though a proud
Winged horse had struck the house with cruel hoof,
Rising to pasture far beyond the cloud.

The door was wide. In every room he peered
And peered, and came at last where the man had lain.
. . . Now but the bones were lying, as he neared:
The gesture, the unsaid word, no more was vain.

Ungarmented, unfleshed, the bones lay all,
Lying where he died like that uprooted elm,
And wanting no more earthly funeral,
And no wrought sound to break the tidal calm.

The Enemy gloomed: "Where is my enemy gone?"
Then stumbled to the door, and fell and rose
And fell once more on the grass and there lay prone,
Until the March night-frost his chill heart froze.

And Spring came. Then the bindweed wrapped him round—
No shroud so strong. The worm that moves below
Perpetually stirred till, with no sound,
The house sank; and the Spring flowered there anew.

I AM THAT CREATURE

I AM that creature and creator who
Looseńs and reins the waters of the sea,
Forming the rocky marge anon anew.
I stir the cold breasts of antiquity,
And in the soft stone of the pyramid
Move wormlike ; and I flutter all those sands
Whereunder lost and soundless time is hid.
I shape the hills and valleys with these hands
And darken forests on their naked sides,
And call the rivers from the vexing springs,
And lead the blind winds into deserts strange.
And in firm human bones the ill that hides
Is mine, the fear that cries, the hope that sings.
I am that creature and creator, Change.

ST. BARTHOLOMEW

I

The gray light through the lustreless few panes
Fell unreflected on the broken floor.
There was a smell as of repeated rains
Collecting and slow oozing. Fluttering o'er
The east window passed the pigeons in and out,
Stone-hued against the stone, with jetty rings,
Showering dust and echoes all about
Aisle and low arches with their rattled wings.
Save the last pigeons everything was dead,
The light, the air, the hour, and all sound fled;
Silence with outer silence blending in one shower was shed.

Strange was the silence flowing from the street
Into this stone-hemmed pool of quiet light.
Where was the children's call, the nearing feet
And passing: where the horns that day and night
Jangled with engine clankings? All was still,
Though night as yet to her far sea-cave clung:
'Twas earliest lucid evening now did spill
Long shadows, and from height to pavement hung
Nets to ensnare the faintly shining day. . . .
'Twas not yet night: why then did no sound stray
Within, without, and swell and slowly die away?

Hardly had noon well passed when in cool shade,
July's hot glare escaping, I strode through
The modern porch into the long decayed
Remnant new-faced of Saint Bartholomew.

Transept and apsidal dwarf'd arch and choir
Were as I knew them, speckled with sunny gold ;
I leaned against the tomb of the first Prior
And there had slept while hours slipped by untold.
But were they mortal hours, this mortal air,
Was this the common light ? How should I dare
To speak or who would answer save with sharp bewildering
Beware ?

Stiff and uneasy moved I from the tomb
Beneath its fretted canopy, and lifted
Dream-eyelids from the undisputed gloom
To the clerestory, where the leaf-light drifted
And floated wanly golden down. And lo,
From a rent roof a larger light was poured ;
Through great holes peered the sky with paling glow.
I caught my breath and gasped, but could no word
Speak, for astonished and afraid I stood,
By silence hushed and grievous solitude ;
I saw but knew not, guessed and feared and nothing understood.

Gently I stepped : I could not bear the sound
Of footsteps following mine. A broken sky
Gleamed up where waters, trickled from all round,
Held ruinous reflection of the high
And jagged roof. Tracery and cusp were shattered,
Broken the vaulting the low aisle that spanned,
And splintered members of the oriel scattered
With other fragments indistinct as sand.
Upon the unlevelled Altar spread a scum
Of poison green : above Rahere's old tomb
Twisted were the thin piers, sole left in the triforium.

It was as though the frost of time had fallen
Slowly, but deadlier than swift lightning's fall:
And strength was sapped, art mocked, and beauty
stolen,
And lichenous ruin was the end of all.
But yet those low and massy columns stayed,
With brooding breast still to old honour vowed;
High clustered lights upon their regiment rayed
And lit faint features in the heads low bowed. . . .
Crept pale eve through in many forbidden places
With birds and airs from strange and silent spaces,
With wind that loosens, rain that cunningly erases.

I stepped between the stony litter where
Century with earlier century lay confused,
And crossed the watery nave and found the stair
Above the transept; climbing as I mused
And musing as I climbed where no ray gleamed,
Trembling befell; the stair was choked and blind,
And I too choking with the fear that brimmed
And overflowed all the awakening mind—
Trembling I stumbled down, bruised hand and knee,
Terror like a sly hound now pursuing me,
Soft panting when, the foot reached, I paused uneasily.

And haste twitched at my nervous hands and feet
As into that deep western gloom I stepped—
Swallowed in dark. Quickened did my heart beat,
I heard it loudly as the silence swept
Above me if I paused. Yet once I hung
Where the twin-arched time-softened screen still held
Its giant shoulders firm; fear on my tongue
Was checked—wonder and fear alike repelled.

Edging and faltering past, peering anew
Into deep shadows where faint crossed beams threw
Discs of pale light in airless caves, again I tranquil grew.

Evening flowed meagre in where the west door
That last time groaned behind me now lay rotten—
Old timbers, panels, hinges and bolts scarce more
Than dust and rust : yet I had not forgotten
The clanking of that sullen latch, the fall
Of iron in its worn socket. But now none
Might be denied :—the western wind's wild call,
Blown rain, the thwart gleam following the sun,
And bats and owls, and ghosts even that the bright
Ascension of the moon in larger light
Releases and her dwindling orb recalls to their long exile's
night.

" From that unpeopled air," I breathed at last,
" From that unechoing ruin to escape ! "
Beneath the ancient roof of stars I passed,
Already pale and clear : the full moon's shape
Lay on the young moon's breast. " 'Tis like a dream
Nursed by a luminous dream," I cried within.
Dark deepened, moonlight grew : did all now seem
The silent flickering of Time's texture thin—
Shaken and shut away or flung away
Half bodiless—stone and street before me lay
In sheen and shadow altered from old memories of day.

On one side lay uneven shapes that were
Not shapes perhaps but shadows of things gone :
A broken edge of wall or roof, with here
A window space, there a columnar stone,
All in the moon's clear silver shadow-barred.

But I looked for the Hospital's low porch,
The never-forsaken stairs, the quiet courtyard,
Then farther taller masses, then the church,
St. Sepulchre's four-pinnacled tower. But now
There was a broken edge of roof or low
Fallen wall, half-shade, half-substance in the moon's silver glow.

And in the midst a desolate square was set.
Were now familiar trees dense forest trees
Of heavy growth, massy and black with jet
And stirless massy shadow, save the breeze
Sighed suddenly. Here too was change and change.
Moss and long grass gave soft beneath my feet
At every step, and water whispered strange,
Trickling a pastoral melody how sweet;
I heard, but could not see. The water flowed,
It seemed, out of the trees in darkness bowed
And through the market square attuning sweet 'twixt low and loud.

So deep the quiet was, the singing water
Did only as an echo's echo sound,
Down falling; nor did my slow footsteps scatter
The ghost-throng with the shadow stealing round.
Then where the hostel's ruin flung great eaves
Of jagged stone dimmed with dark mass, I stooped,
Suddenly weary of the unbreathing leaves
And stirless branches of the trees close-grouped
Like other stone. There crawled I and there sank
Half absently, half sensible. As I drank
That stillness up the stars advanced in bright disordered rank.

II

Light woke me. Morning fluttered wan and cool.
I rose, my fingers brushed the sparkling dews
Under the eaves. A pale and restless pool
Teased hand and lip and eye, while the first hues
Broadened upon the frore and ageless walls
That now all lovely were, and no more strange.
" How like another clear hue silence falls,"
I thought, " Washing with immaterial change
All that once changeless and enduring seemed ! "
Now immaterial too the wan pool gleamed,
And I alone stood firm where rays ethereal streamed.

My feet moved soft on moss and muted stone,
Past heaps with tarnished fungus richly dyed
And purple and gold weeds in crannies sown
By careless flinging winds. Briefly enskied,
A kestrel hung and swooped and rose again
In vast and easy circling disappearing :
And then I heard a cloud of daws complain,
Lifting and falling, darkening and clearing—
But human motion none, nor print of feet
I saw, when any human sign were sweet,
Nor human sound I heard though all my sense did human
voice entreat.

Westward was but a green-flushed waste wherein
Once-lofty mass with broken viaduct lay,
And rain-pools shimmered, saplings nodded thin
Above, and brown leaf husks fell in light spray
At a sudden wind. So with uncertain tread
From crumbling stone to stone silent I stepped.

There in a shallow valley the ruin spread,
And unimprisoned there the clear Fleet slipped,
A gleaming rivulet with whispered rushes,
And water-mint, and buds and bells 'neath bushes,
And cumber of weedy wreck where tangled water chides
and hushes.

And not an eye but mine to see the sparkling
Of this pure crispèd flood on amber floor ;
No voice, save of the flood into a darkling
Hollow deep-drawn, with dripping weed hung o'er.
Here might birds shake, and beasts athirst bend lapping,
The hawk hold all the rivulet in his eye ;
But when did foot of man answer the tapping
Of water on these stones, or voice reply ?
So oft my foot the tunnelled stream had crost,
And I unthinking ; now my thought was tost
Feather-like on random airs and in a dark cloud lost.

Scarce wondering then I looked. The square Tower still
Gleamed white, or blosmy-flushed, against the sky—
St. Andrew's, sole erect upon its hill
Above the stream, and watching Time flow by
Clear and unhaunted as the stream ; and only
The bleached Tower and the roofless gaunt walls stood,
Time-consecrated now anew, so lonely
Even my hush'd pulse had broke the solitude.
" Return ! " the clear stream murmured ; and I turned
Nor crossed. The fresh sun on dazed eyelids burned,
And leaf-like stems of glittering heat towards the pale sky
yearned.

And as a dream flows through the dreaming mind,
All that I saw and heard drew wavelike by.

Dim, muffled ear, and inward orb struck blind
With blindness, so I went : while silently
The long slow plashless vision heaved and passed,
'Mid bended wanton weed with late dew spangled,
And 'neath the uneven shadow narrowly cast
By walls with ruin buttressed, creeper-tangled—
All flowing slowly, plashless, soundless on
Under morn's aery arch and glittering sun :
All faintly viewed then dreamlike and uncomprehended flown.

But now first movement startled me. A hound
Rose at my step out of a sudden ditch,
Disappearing behind a hawthorn mound,
Uneasy : and following a pregnant bitch.
I heard, far off, the uplifted lingering note
Answered from farther off ; then silent all,
Save if anon a wrangling cry might float
Past, and like new snow upon deep soft snow fall,
Dying quietly. Last the wrangling hushed,
And I stepped lightlier, and unfearful brushed
Sharp spiny bramble through and pale uncurling frondage crushed.

Long then I stood nor lifted these weak eyes,
And wondered from what night into what day
I had awaked, what voice had breathed, *Arise !*
To what new life was called my slumbrous clay.
How like a dream oft dreamed, at last escaped,
Smouldered old life behind me, vext and dire,
Half by divine faith, half by folly shaped,
A smothered brightness, a betrayed desire. . . .
A dream oft dreamed ! And now, sick with old dreams,

Lifting my gaze, following the sun's clear beams
Southwards I saw the broadened waters of the silver-sliding
Thames.

Low alders knelt upon the opposing marge
Laving their limbs ; and few tall trees, new-fledged,
Did over rising ground their breasts enlarge,
Delaying the soft wind ; beyond, green-ridged,
All down the south the Kentish hill-line showed
Dark-forested ; the sunken lands between
Glittered where the thin tributaries flowed,
Hid, spread, and slipped on slyly through the green.
Forsaken now those sunken suburbs were :
Mole-like, and multiplying like vermin, there
Had men lived once ; but now nor sound nor motion marred
the air.

So blest the emptiness that no regret
Awhile could touch me for the voices stilled ;
Easy that gross confusion to forget
Now, when but light and air and hue were spilled
Soundless upon the leagues of wooded range.
Heroic seemed that long-enduring grief
Of tortured being, strife unsubdued by change,
By pain unawed, or Death—of enemies chief
In strength and swift deceit ; heroic too
The old aspiring toward life sweet and new :—
Heroic even the silence with man's long-paused passion
grew.

—Noble and mournful ecstasy ! Then withdrawing
From that green misty distance my dew'd sight,
I saw blanch'd stone of ruined arches flawing
The idle-footed Thames ; and broken height
Of twin piers where a perished bridge was flung.

And there, older than aught but memory,
Witness to days when memory was young,
That great Tower stood which cold mortality
Vainly had washed with seasons' ebb and surge :
Still against rude Oblivion to urge
Reverence for them that built, and sleep beyond Time's measured verge.

Minutes were hours as I stood musing on
Time and the birth and death of human things,
And mine own kin, far out of knowledge gone
And all their story faint far echoings,
Ambiguous fragment and slow-dying shade,
Wherein was no form whole and no tone clear.
Curbless, my thoughts with sudden phantoms played
And watched them die ; but that familiar, Fear,
Lingered, and darkened threatening through the mind.
I was alone with Fear, whose sockets blind
Yet burned and hands waved slow and shade increased behind.

Paled even Fear, till I again possessed
My spirit. I left the spread stream's sedgy bound
And clambered tumbled slopes up towards the crest
By the great remnant of St. Paul's still crowned—
Domeless, with dim-guessed circle where the Dome
Did once its black admirèd rondure poise ;
Echoless the light winds now for ever roam,
Unheard the loud winds west to east might noise ;
Hemmed now no more with huddled stone, but trees
Lofty, wide-armed, heaving in soft unease
Against the walls as round chalk cliffs, no whiter, wash the dark seas.

III

Streamed light through western gaps as from without
I peered, following the light ; but when I drooped
These eyes they fell where lizards in and out
The sun and shadow slipped, or lay wide-grouped
Drinking the heat, washed in the sunny gold,
Dispread at ease on glittering moss and herb.
How did that breathing joy my heart withhold
Awhile from pain and longings that perturb !
So eased I looked aloft : far in the sky
A noble falcon roved and mounted high,
Disdaining the shaggy earth that shrank beneath his eye.

And, gazing far and near, through bushes parted,
The bushes heaved and shook—a badger slipped
Close by, and when I moved he slid shy-hearted
Through other shade. Vainly I following crept.
Then as I watched anew, all eye and ear
Intent, a sudden voice of antique sound
Reached me astonished, breathed from somewhere near,
Scarce understood, unanswered, for all round
Quick-pulsed and checked I stared ; until more plain
The voice—" Return the dead to life again,
Seeking for things once known with hungering eyes and vain ? "

Eyes gave the answer that my tongue still held.
It was an old man, lean, light-eyed, with hue
Of many summers burned : his air of eld
Spoke, but uncrooked his spine, each springy thew
Unslackened. Coarse wool wrapped him loose about :
Else saw I nothing, for upon my eyes

Fell his, and searched them for the soundless thought,
Eager with question, soundless with surprise.
" 'Tis of you I would ask," at length I said.
" I guideless out of homely Time have strayed ;
Kindle now the bright darkness so this wounding wonder be allayed."

Swiftly he answered then, " Here is no room
For fear, and scarce I guess of wounds and woe
Save as dark rumours, unwreathed from the gloom
Of ancient days. But sometimes wild dreams flow
Back to the time when sickness shook the earth,
When multitudes moved blindly—disappeared all,
Slain by slow terrors, death confused with birth.
So rumours through Sleep's silver portal crawl :
So have I heard lamenting voices, seen
Astonished eyes, hands have uplifted been ;
Even such, estrangèd so, rise yours amid this pure serene."

" Yet tell me," soon I breathed. " 'Tis I have slept :
Ignorant now I wake, and all is change.
Century following swift century surely swept
Like a mad herd past. I am strange—all is strange.
When last I spoke to living ears earth teemed
With number ; men were like grass—now perished grass.
Here were their millions sown, unless I dreamed
Then, and now dream not ; here their being was,
Here sprang they, here loved, here begot, lived, died,
Lived anew in their sons and multiplied. . . .
Live they no more but under Time's vast noteless litter hide ? "

Now his firm hand fell kindly on my shoulder.
" Let sorrow hush, while here we linger telling

Each our half story of things dark and older
Than common dreams." Near a spring's faint-heard welling
We sat, and straight I told him what had passed—
My sleep and dazed awaking. " And now here
Horror torments me as I backward cast
My uncertain mind, back from this morning clear
Of light and dew and silence ; questioning
What stealthy blight or planet's fatal wing
Brushed my old kin and left their home so fair and void a thing.

" Here once they lived, but whither are they gone ?
I know, I know what airless life they led
In towns like tunnels, and all they burrowing on,
Following a dream that beckoned and still fled.
I with them tunnelled, I that pale dream followed,
Breathed their thick breath (clutched in that dream-vext crowd).
Into a silent cave their way was hollowed,
And some contented went, some worn, some proud
And grave, all by mortality oppressed,
Following the immortal dream in such unrest
As mocks a wild fowl whose torn wing withholds her from the far-off nest.

" My kin were they. . . . Listen ! Hard by I stood
Once when noon arched this hill with lofty blue,
And all the dense street hushed like solitude
With burial thoughts, and Death rode softly through
Caressing his proud horse with easy hand,
With soft-shrilled trumps and faintly shaking plumes.
I saw the hoof-prints on the scattered sand,
I felt his breath sweep cold from cavern'd glooms.

And I saw all that mute, memorial host
Soon in few hours or years following that Ghost,
And other myriads hushed anew, but my own generation
lost.

" For all flows on. But did the moaning tide,
Retreating, never again break on this shore ? " . . .
His eyes on mine fell from lids calm and wide,
His voice as calm breathed my dark passion o'er
Soothingly ; and I heard : " Here where we lie
Men's habitations were and miles round thickened,
Swarming like poisonous smoke ; and far and nigh
In other clots, close knit, men crawled and sickened ;
Fought, nor knew wisely for what end they fought,
Victor with victim into like ruin brought,
Tormented with the blindness of low-drooping thought.

" I cannot tell you how it was. They grew
Like smoke of some dense-rooted, bloomless fire.
Then gathering out of Time a black wind blew
Hither, and question rained on men's desire,
Till desire perished. Even the young were old,
Yes, even lust, that last dear Enemy, died.
There was no more increase ; the blood grew cold,
Withered the breasts ; the useless womb had dried . . .
How shall I tell ? Faint is their story grown,
From wandering tongue to wandering tongue passed on,
And few to cry as you, ' Whither has their cloud gone ? '

" It was as when into an air of bees,
Whose honey and wings' music double sweet
With sweetness, some gray midget of disease
Floats all unseen ; none hears his pinions beat—
So slight is Death whose shadow so enorm—

From golden hive to humming golden hive,
Flicking cold silent languor on each warm
And singing mansion ; scarce one left alive
Of their gold nation. And the harvests waste,
Save hungry honey-robbers smell and haste,
Lean paws and lolling tongues, and there in silence feast.

" And this I know—my fathers' fathers fled
Naked into such wilderness as was,
With unseen burden haunting each sad head.
Might few enduring on such blind flight pass,
Shrinking from human breath as pestilence,
From muted hamlet, wailful, smokeless town,
Painful, untended herds :—through long nights dense
With deeper than earth's dark poured silent down.
Might few endure, and who too tender dropped
Unburied lay, 'mid grass that no kine cropped,
Till gorged, slow-moving crows their listless flapping
stopped."

IV

My hand was raised beseeching, and he ended ;
And holding each our silent thought we stayed,
While the fine gold of drooping light fell splendid,
Between stone, tree and violet glooms deep rayed.
" So does this sunlight, so your words, amid
My spirit's darkness cast long golden spears,
Revealing other darks and sorrows hid
From these soon dimming eyes, deeper than tears."
Then he : " But I am long, long past that grief :
'Tis but a tale, half faded from belief.
Hear it but as a tale told to a child for pain's relief."

" Not so," I answered. " Thought breathes not so lightly.
I cannot but remember and remember :
All that was dear, all that is lost, glows brightly
As in fresh wind a sullen-swelling ember,
Nourishing the old fire—ah, for what unguessed use ? "
But on my palms his fingers touched, and chill
And languid I remained, nor could refuse
Hearing :—" Far off it is, though painful still. . . .
The few that fled, growing fewer, swiftly passed
The western guarding hills, and there at last
Naked on the new wilderness their haunted spirits
cast.

" There then they stayed, fugitive from the death
That wormed dispeopling through a swarming land.
Secret they homed, fearful of each quick breath,
Forgetting old skills of the cunning hand,
Habiting caves, hiving not for to-morrow,
Mutely content if night to morning wore.
All was forgot—forgot at last even sorrow . . .
So women again on flowing bosoms bore
Children uncursed with memory, who grew
Easy as a tree the wind blows careless through ;
And treelike of wind, earth, rain, sun, alone their wisdom
grew.

" Then lightly the years fell on them as soft flakes
Of pure snow newly sheath the earliest shoot,
And silence spread all round in deepening lakes.
The past was no more than the wild owl's hoot
Flown hollow where far woodlands hemmed their earth,
And age to come lay moonlike, calm and sleeping.
So on the natural tides of death and birth
They moved, while the renewing airs came sweeping

Silently into blood and heart and brain ;
Fair in men's eyes appeared man's life again,
And brief mortality no longer mad or vain.

" I alone, pondering on a world forgotten,
Hither am come, whispering an ancient Muse ;
For in these emblems of firm things found rotten,
In shapes that shift and shadows that confuse,
Fain would I find some dream and aim undying
And tread with printless feet a vanished way,
Here catch, and here, 'neath weed and rain-pool lying,
Ancestral vision, to-day in yesterday,
Old time in new, and hear the enduring mind
Out of a world gross, dark and undesigned
Her bright imaginations breathe again upon the flickering
wind.

" O thou lost Muse, or silent or unseeing,
Whom Spring hath lacked and languid Winter wanted,
Thee have the rivers mourned, and the winds fleeing
Moaned after, through forsaken cities haunted
In all their wreck by mute, pale memories.
Might I but hear revived thine antique tones
Trembling along the nerved centuries,
Faint-echoed here from hush'd cave and old stones ! "
Then my voice fondly answered, " Even so I
Would wake and hearken, breathing dear reply ;
But song and memory in one airless silence lie."

With mind reverted each hung still, and now
Day shrank and night shook out her dusky hue,
And the stars swayed and tossed on every bough
Or poured their steady beam dark arches through—

Arcturus, Perseus and Andromeda,
The clustered lights and lonely rooted lights,
Remembered stars, or indistinct as spray
Momently clinging to black sea-cliff heights;
While Mercury, Saturn, fire-breasted Mars began
Moving serene as Princes in the van
Of glittering wars and torchlike streamed through night's
vast trembling span.

And now he rose and poured his eyes in mine,
His spirit sank through me and mine with his
Sought union. Clear in the stars' pale shine
We stood and still our eyes held other's eyes.
My grief marred not his brow, but thought showed there
Quiet with inward vision; while in my heart
Sweetness welled up, and O what gentler air
Washed all my sense and breathed these lips apart!
—But not to speech. There was no whispered word.
Only the falling of water now I heard,
And owl-like shifting note and scream of startled bird;

And then the lifting snarling of the hounds,
Terrible as death, sudden as sickness, rang,
Till that too ended and no other sounds
Out of the dark with chilling menace sprang.
But all gloomed swiftly, those grave eyes were gone,
Flapped sombre o'er my vision Night's dun wing;
Not now the infinite starry armies shone,
So broad did Night her deep-plumed feathers fling:—
Dark all and still. My thoughts drew far away,
Dreamless I slept on till black thinned to gray,
Then woke from dark and griefs and stared at light and
day—

Light, winged or leaping clear from high to low,
Light like pure water flooding the foot-worn tile,
Light following Time's rude paw with flakes of snow,
Light wantoning in a ghostly-peopled aisle ;
Light in his brief embrace with shrinking shade
Begetting warmer shades of ruddier hue,
Light shaking in wide pools where colour made
Softer confusion ; buds of light that grew
Roselike and flung their gleaming petals round
Dishevelled where vast piers burst from the ground
As rocks that shake the wild seas back with deep triumphant
sound.

Swift is the birth of dreams, their life and pride,
And swift their death—but Time burns slow and wan.
Now did mortality resume dim-eyed,
Dry-breasted, and in common channels ran.
Familiar jarring noise of mart and street
Flowed in upon me sense-encumbered there,
Again I heard the hushing, shuffled feet,
'Neath the Prior's tomb a woman knelt for prayer ;
And from the organ's soft-breathed fluting flew
Notes that like dreaming heavenly voices grew
And left slow-dying echoes sweet as early, shrinking dew.

"After the withdrawal of the Roman legions, in 418 A.D., London became a prey to violence and disorder, and its history is lost for another four centuries. The influence of Roman civilization seems to have totally disappeared during this period."

RISE NOW

Rise now, an end to rest. The wind sighs from the West
With all things tenderest, and whispers, Go!
Shadow with lifted finger bids thee no more linger,
The owl is only singer with painful note and slow.
Gone are those fire-breathed hues, and thickly fall the dews
Unsparkling. Dost thou muse on days far off and fair?
Save the brushing boughs upon this lampless house
Is movement none to rouse the slow unwinged air.
Now from familiar rooms into unfooted glooms
Where shadow hugest looms, pass dreadless on thy way.
Ah, how the dry stairs creak and gentle echoes speak,
How things remembered seek thy fond step to stay!
How oft thy idle hand from stair to door hath spanned,
How oft here didst thou stand and snuff the night!
It was thy passage wore these steps down to the door,
Thy foot on the loud floor, and hark, the cricket sings.
Now the hinges groan in muffled grumbling tone,
Even as in childhood known: the slow door swings.
—Yes, leave the door ajar, only some late-risen star
From heavenly hollows far will slant her silvering light:
Nought else will enter . . . O, what shape is that, bent low
And stark, and silent so? Nay, 'tis but hunted Fear.
That was his breath she heard when from the thorn-bush stirred
Wings of a startled bird and fluttered here.

Now house and garden gone, into the deep unknown
Pass, and pass alone. Some greenwood road, maybe,
Thy stumbling foot will find, in age forgot designed,

Some star or murmuring wind awake and company thee.
Old memories will pursue thy path the forest through,
Murmuring, " O, not adieu ! " and wild lips seek
Farewell from thine, in vain ; for there is only rain
On boughs that tap the pane thy soft farewell to speak.

PART II

FAMILY GROUP

The low-branched oak-tree made
A background of steep shade
To that first family group of four.
And how well I remember
In the sunlight of September
The shifting and the hushing of the four.

Beatrix was close-propped by
Katie and Emily:
I, crouched between, made up the four.
Ended at last the hushing,
The nudging and sly pushing,
Till all sat stiff upon the grassy floor.

Yes, all of us is here—
Bonneted dark eyes peer,
I staring most of all the four:
Their proud and summer draping,
Their shut smiles half escaping,
And the perplexity my small face wore.

But something here is gone.
Where is the bow that shone
Seven-hued, high-arched above the four?
Artist, were you so blinded,
So envious or cold-minded,
That you showed not the sign that arched us o'er?

And something dark appears
Now after thirty years,
A bony shade glooms on the four.
Artist, did you espy it
Far off, and deny it,
So that not then the shade gloomed "Never more"?

Katie and Emily,
Beatrix between, and I
Leaned on thin hand made up the four.
Still the wide oak may stoop there
And other children group there,
But not in mortal flesh again that four.

CHOOSING HYMNS

We sat and sang our hymns. The sweet-mouthed organ
Muted its music into dreariest drones.
The widow chose, then the aunt and strait-lipped daughter,
And rejoiced in the lingering, lugubrious tones.

Through the west mullion I could see the hawthorn
Baring his boughs, and scarce a leaf left behind.
The plain cold light grew dusk as we chose on,
And voices with the sad-stopped organ whined.

And then I chose " The Church's One Foundation,"
Because, I said, as a boy I liked it best.
As we sang all five verses I saw through the window
The young naked moon couched on the hawthorn's breast.

FORTY YEARS

THESE forty years! And forty years ago
You waited for me, day after weary day.
Then lived I but in you; now you in me
Live—a desire, a need, a memory.

And wait you now again, in the unapparent
And silent or but angel-winged air?
Wait you even now for me, to ease you again,
Mother, of a longing, of a fear and pain?

THE BOUGH

Lovely are birds singing from hedge to hedge,
Their voices fall through the air swifter than wings.
They flitter and wait and hover about the edge
  Of Spring, remembering not other Springs.

Their song it seems that on the leaf sheds rime—
Bright as the rimy sparkling are their notes ;
As if to urge on slow and halting Time,
  Quicken the songs in bubbling throats.

Each crumbled earth under the loosening air
Opens—lying all damp and dark to the light.
Many times many, sly burrowing everywhere,
  Stirs another world, hid from sight.

Sleep, sleep the belovèd still. . . . Or waking now,
Spring-quickened, runneth your thought within my mind ?
Is it you, is it you rise in me, as in this bough
  Move earth and water and sun and wind ?

NOW THE PIED SPANIEL WHINES

Now the pied spaniel whines
Long and shrill—Hush, hush, Spot!
The sleepers when they wake will cry
Longer: awake them not.

Spot to her bed crawls shaking,
Now all is quiet—no,
What are these smokelike shapes, these voices
That out of faintness grow?

They have not seen me here
Bent in the half gloom.
Now at the head one stands, the rest
Flow round the room

With a soft aery motion,
And each his station takes
Swaying, then stirless all, save one
Nearest my corner shakes—

A small wisp of grey smoke
He seems, with restless eye,
Pale face, and pale hair falling about.
Then his voice anxiously,

"How can we lift him, he
So heavy, so tall?
We are bid carry him away with us,
We so light, so small."

Next him one answered, "Hush!
A moment, foolish sprite,
A moment yet, and what we bear
Is small and light."

" Is it not this body then,
This bearded, gashly face
And trunk enorm ? "
" Hush, now ! "
And Silence grows apace.

Spot shivers 'neath my hand
Afraid, I shiver too.
Now the watched body heaves no more,
Dims the wick's lambent dew

Near darkness ; for a breath
Soft fills the room,
And shadows quake upon the wall,
Then hide in nichèd gloom.

Now all the spirits lift,
As in a thin gray cloud,
Something I see not clearly, moving
Small in the shroud ;

And bear it past me, as
The youngest sprite breathes, " Why
To yield so small and slight a ghost
Did such a huge flesh die ?

" What of that flesh ? " But answer
I straining cannot hear,
For all are gone, and as I rise
Spot whines anew her fear.

Snuffing the lamp I stoop
O'er the tumbled bed.
Still now that easeless body, still
Even the easeless head.

The full cheeks and puffed eyes,
The silver beard,
The pallid hand, the voice that sleeps
Or breathes unheard. . . .

For all those sins achieved
And when achieved despised, hated, repented ;
For those attempted sins that fear prevented
Before delight was sweet upon the tongue ;
For those small sins accustomed, unperceived
That run like vermin under the hardening skin ;
And for those sins forgotten which were yet
Another sin, and sadder, to forget :—
O, for each sin
To which the gay, dependent body clung
Lest, wanting, it be withered quite
And every leaf whirl brittle through the night . . .
For these, yes, yes, for these.
But these beyond,
For those wished sins that now the false and fond
Spirit, retasting sweetness in old memories
Of all delight,
Would fain have wrought
But now lie stillborn on the breast of thought ;
Yes, yes,
For those wished sins be chief forgiveness.

And yet this morn of wind and sun
How should I wish undone
Whate'er was in the mind's morning vigour done,
When the æolian body to the fingering air
Breathed a confusèd music everywhere ?
O, had that music harshly muted been,
That were chiefest sin !
But in these veins flowing with primal joy,
This mind that leaps upon the body of life
In dear embrace and everlasting loving strife,

In these lives no repentance or annoy.
I know regret
Moves but to darken, deepen and destroy,
And burn more bitterly in,
With its fierce acid, the fading shapes of sin.
Be far from me, regret,
Nor hang leech-like and swollen on my mind.
Light are those sins that I forget,
Light the sins undesigned,
Lighter the sins desired but never shaped,
The chrysalids that never spring escaped
To flash brief wanton beauty on the wind.

THE NIGHTINGALES

TO ROBIN FLOWER

MUSING upon imperishable things,
Honour and love and sorrow, as I walked
I came where water murmured of the hills
That flow down from the shoulders of the north
Into the shimmering green pool of the sea.
The unsteady water ran from the hill-shadows,
Itself a frightened shadow hurrying on
Into the starry clearness of May meads
All green and gold and sweet with opening buds.
The dew danced briefly between dusk and sun
But when the willow branches gave no shade
Save to the sleeping fins beneath the banks.
The rising wood waved " Come ! "
Then I passed in,
Plunging through sodden leaves and winter mire
That tardy May dried not, and leapt into
A sudden lake of blue—all sweet and heat
And wavering light—tall bluebells sunny dappled
Whose pale green stems and folded buds and bells
Shaking out hue and odour drew the mind
Down into deep delights, to lie there swaying
Like amber weed fingered by every tide . . .
Faded those three grave visitants as I sank—
Honour and love and sorrow—and I watched
Their shadows slow withdrawing through a thin
Spinney beyond the shining lake. The boughs
Raking above netted the azure sky
And snared the clouds that turned and broke away
Torn by the branches or the fretting wind.

So cloud and leaf and air and light and bird
Flowed over me as I swayed sunken deep,
An idle weed fingered by every tide.

It was a nightingale above my head
Answering a nightingale unseen but near,
It was a nightingale that called me from
That sunken streaming of the sensual tide,
With notes like syllables in the silent mind
In silent night uttering things dear or sad.
But that unseen bird answered with the voice
Of smarting love, and crying, " Kiss me now
And bid all thoughts begone but thought of joys
Born of my lips ! " Yes, it was anxious love
Stealing the voice of that hid nightingale
And quickening sleepy memories with each note
Till the notes failed.
Then the first singer poured
His song anew, pure, fresh, sustained—as though
Water-like it might fall all day, all night
Renewed, renewing. And I listening saw
Again those three shades from the spinney come—
Honour and love and sorrow—listening too
While that wild singer uttered yet his notes
So quick, and ranging wide 'tween earth and heaven,
That only thought could follow (even as shadow
Follows the flying feet of light from lake
To cool green hollow of the couchèd hills)—
Then paused, and called and ceased.
How common seemed
That shining pool as I brushed by and shook
The shady dews from bended bells and snapped,
Heedless, the stems. The nightingale was gone,

And I pressed musing through the beamy wood,
And with me those three shadows whispering
One to another words that I could hear,
Half-understanding.

I CANNOT see. Gone now is all that brightness
That was the moon between unclouding leaves.
Among wet boughs I wander as one sightless,
A breathing, moving tree
That of the nightly dew his life receives.
Eyes might no sharper beauty bring to me
Than smell, touch, hearing leaf'd with sudden energy.

It is the earth I smell, the rooted trees
Breathing as I breathe now at every cell:
The earth I hear, sleep-moving in slow ease
After the long, long day:
The earth I touch, when the brush'd brambles spill
Their dews, and the wet leaves of elder spray,
Beam, briony, hawthorn snare me on my undirected way.

Eyes might no brighter beauty than this gloom
Bring to the burning mind—the burning mind
That lights even time's sickness with its bloom.
Here in this wood of night,
Where sleep and waking change as a soft wind
Falling and rising, here the dark is bright,
And leaves and dews and blossoms stream with inward light.

Is it that sharper senses now are mine,
Or is it earth and dew and green are sweeter,
And the unsteady wind more distant-fine
With the primal air?
Are all these no more than the shadowy matter
That dreams make play with, and no substance bear
More than the drifted smoke that thinning is seen nowhere?

It cannot be that these are less than I.
Sweet, sweet, sweet is the green smell of the grass—
Not my love's hair smells sweeter, nor her eye
    Purer than the unseen dew.
Cold, cold as dawn the rustling as I pass
Of heavy branches, cold and sweet; and through
The branches sound wild voices, soft airs old and new.

In this bright dark I stray. And halted now,
My hand on the mossed body of a tree
Shedding her weightless dews from every bough
    Upon the dense-leaved ground,
I too sway when the wind draws over me
Soft-moving fingers; I too am earth-bound
By sudden running roots with the tree's roots enwound.

And the tree quivers while my hand's at rest,
Quivers because the wind is whispering her,
Pressing a little, sinking upon her breast,
    And now falling asleep;
Quivering because my spirit it was did stir,
And not the wind, my branches now that sweep
Her branches, and my thoughts that into her thought creep.

I do not know what far-drawn airs divine,
Late-muted, through the wood's notes now are breaking;
What angel, from an undreamed sky, within
    The darkness of the leaves
The long earth trance from her pure spirit is shaking.
An inward quickening in the branches heaves,
And of that fitful stir a solemn music weaves.

It draws through all her boughs and droops and lifts
While darkness like a bird shakes in his nest,
Then sleeps; and wild or grave the music drifts

Distant, and once more nears
And dewlike falls on the heart's long unrest.
So with that music sleep all wanton fears
And thoughts perverse and pain of unforgotten years. . . .

Calm in the music that is earth's, yet more
Than earth unstarred by heavenly light may breathe.
No lovely uncontenting earthly shore
Such music knows, to break
Tranc'd numbness and foreshadowings of death ;
Even this tree might not with such airs shake
Save in its bosom'd shade the heavenly singer wake.

Ends the calm thus ?—The song ends, the tree quivers,
Her breast shrinks from my hand, and my hand falls.
In a harsh air the branches shake their rivers
Coldly upon the grass.
But still one night-bird to another calls
Between long silences while dark hours pass—
Calls, and each silence deeper sounds for song that was.

Now let thy dark soft-breathing hair upon
My face fall with the kiss of cooling seas.
Now from thine eyes no flame
Be darted into my bosom, for such heat
Is but to madness sweet.
Nor tell each brief-winged hush to sing my name
With echoes faintly syllabling every note,
While shadows rook-like slowly homeward float.

I have seen thee : it is enough.
But as the shadows darken all the weald
While shadowy rooks float homeward from their field,
Scarf with soft-breathing hair thy brow and eyes.
Then even as grass is sweet in dark dew'd hours
And the air speaks the name of unseen flowers,
And not a beam nor shadow moves,
Then shall I know thee near.

Come, Come,
Out of the soft white-bosomed cloud
Swaying its rondure o'er my head.
Come, Come,
Light of that Lamp whose beam is shed
Through the broad shady East.
Come, Come!

Love, Love,
I clasp and find the cloud but air,
My lips and hands unblissful move.
Come, Come!
Your breast and lips but shadows prove,
You like a stream float on—
Gone, gone.

Come, Love.
Stands nothing constant but my need?
Answers no shape my hungered thought?
Come, Come,
Body of air and water and light,
Long imaged and long sought—
Love, come!

DARK NIGHT

It was in such a night,
Far, far from all
These western vast-scooped hillsides where
Silver waters fall,
In such a night when birds
Into deep-leaved nests
Have fluttered, and last piping hush'd
In sleepy breasts;
It was in such a night—
But never again
Could night such promise bear and end
In such blind pain.
Bird in their bower, and beasts
Each in his lair,
Stars in the lone and solemn height
Darkening the air:
Music and motion stayed,
Stilled even the wind,
But of all nights returning none
Like that night of the mind.

FONDER THY FAREWELLS

O LOOSE me from thy voice,
Whose whispered syllables
Were sweeter once
In their soft-hushed, soft-hushing tones
Than desert wells.

O loose me from thy look.
Sweeps down through cloud-paced night
The full moon's shine,
And on these shadowed eyes of mine
Thy rounded light.

Ah, from thy moonlike love
Set me free, set me free . . .
The dark shrinks and falls,
Light quickens, the owl dims, the thrush calls:
Night's secrecy

Yields at last unto day's
Maiden-clear syllables.
Thy voice in other tones
Yet sweeter is, purer thy gaze than once,
Fonder thy farewells.

Why will you, thoughts, look back when to look back
Bares the old nerve of pain that Time had dulled?
What bird returns to the long empty nest
And grieves 'tis empty still, with lichen wet
That mocks the quick-breathed and forgotten bosom
All song and air once, now all dust and death?
O thoughts, keep still your slow pace towards the late
Dusky-ridg'd skies; or if your wings again
Tremble with flight when April's in the air,
Hover not around that scarred and naked earth
Where passion flamed, and anger, and burned up
All tender growth of flower and spreading leaf . . .
Come back, come back! It is April again, and here
Violets again and primroses and clear green;
But on that naked and unshadowed earth
The wounds are open still. You linger there,
Poor thoughts, as though once more the hill was green,
As though even now on flower and leaf the dew
Might shine, and eve's sweet bird her first shy song
Sing over. Look, 'tis a bare embittered earth;
You dreamed—nothing of sweetness ever may be
Again, that once was there. Uncover your eyes
And gaze uncheated upon a burnt-up Eden.

So to my thoughts I speak, for they fly after
Her image, crying, "Here she passed, and here
Your hand touched hers, your lips, and April then
Was even as now."
But she is not here now.

Be near!
When the wind wailed
Out of distance, shrill and lonely,
Then stood you here;
Not then you sleeping failed.
But now I fear.

Be near.
When that tall shade
Came flapping mothlike at life's candle,
Swiftly did appear
Your eyes' kind light that made
Even darkness dear.

Now be near.
Never so sore my need.
Cold and silence are enlarging:
I have heard, and hear,
Time's muted, moaning reed.
It thrills my ear.

Be near.
So shall Time slip
Back slyly to the salt glittering cavern
Where the dead hear
His desolate music drip
Minutely clear.

Near, near?——
Impossible cry.
Even as you answering come I journey
To a new hemisphere
Where the freed heart broods silently,
And bids none near.

WINTER IS HERE

The songs I sang to you
Are sung no more.
The songs you sang to me
You still sing o'er—
But not for me those throbbing songs you pour.

Simple and wanton notes
Between us flew,
Then brief silences
Yet sweeter grew—
Now silence only and day's waning hue,

Like a still pool,
And no song shakes
With sudden dipping wing
Its cheek and wakes
A sleepy echo; not a breath that crystal breaks.

The songs you sang to me
One daylong year
Cleave now another pool;
No wing sweeps near
But folding cloud and night . . . Winter is here.

I saw you,
I held you,
And surely I heard you :
But you were as far as any man living could be.

Though sometimes
I have seen you,
And touched you and heard you,
As together we walked and your sleeve now and then
brushed mine ;

Yet were you then
Farther, farther
Than with body's absence—
But who walks with you now while your thoughts are
here and brush mine ?

The slow waters
Of three oceans,
And the change of seasons,
Between us are but as a new-leafy hawthorn hedge,

And I see you
And hold you :—
But are you yet living,
Or come you now nearer than any man living may be ?

BROAD BE THY LIGHT

Broad be thy light, O Land, like water bright,
Thy peace like water deep that seems to sleep.
Like woods thy soft clouds wherein the light nests warm ;
Let shadows on thy meadows move like sheep.

Thy birds are lovely birds and lovely voices,
And lovely songs they sing in the rainy spring.
Silver hair thy streams, drawn through tangled dreams
Of trees and meads and trees that shake and sing.

Thy harvest fields that lie 'neath the full-moon sky
Through all the moony vale are silver pale.
Broad in thy light, O Moon, the land lies bright ;
Asleep or musing deep is all the vale.

There should no angers move on the face men love,
Fear should not be there, nor sick despair ;
But clear and steady eyes and old histories,
And thought invisible made visible there.

Art thou awake ? Thy silver hair doth shake,
Thy breathing stirs the airs that drowsed all night.
Be thy heart near that is to my heart dear,
Broad be thy light, O Land, like the sun bright.

PAUSE, pause—recall the arrow of thy flight
Towards that faint-amber'd white
Pinnacle of light.
Pause now, and down to the diminished earth—
Here faint wreathed, there cloaked all with night—
That dim and once vast-sceming globe wherein
Thou hadst thy birth,
Cast down thy sight.
And now the mist is swift, the gloom grows thin.
But was it there—
Breathed I that dismal and damp-clinging air ?
Upon those snowy heaps,
Upon shagg'd fells or splintered bare,
Looked I from valley'd deeps
And saw their petty cloud-dwarf'd height
Crowned with pure visionary moons and dawns
And dreams as strange, as bright
As sleep's ?
Yes, it was there :
Thy lips were satisfied with that green air,
Those peaks all splintered, bare—
Save for such glow as falls from Alpine height
To valley'd deeps—
Those flushing, sparkling lawns,
Those rivers flowing on through meads as calm and bright
As sleep's ;
These were thy home. And there
Beneath those clustered roofs, through windows pale
Reach yet thy soon-forgetting sight.
That wimpled head, that face by age's veil
Obscured and harsh gray hair. . . .
And hark, the echoes of thine own faint feet,

And human tones
Still whispered soft from hearth and hurrying street
And lofty leaf-like stones.
These were thy home, and warm and sweet
'Neath day and night,
As wine and bread to thy lone spirit were,
As the bosom's air,
As the eyes' blessed light.
Pause now, for even the lark returns to the earth,
Her song diminishing yet never forgot
Though she awhile beds in some dusty spot;
Nor forget earth, for earth is sweet,
Nor forget from what height
Thou art falling, falling now,
To move in the familiar field and street
In the few fluttered hours 'twixt night and night.

THE DOOR

I HAVE looked through the door
But may not enter.
Flowers, trees, grasses grow there
Green in the spring,
And I know unseen rivers flow there.

Jasmine binds the door
Standing ajar.
So sharp rises the smell there
Of jasmine flowers,
I am bound as by a painful spell there,

And the starry vines
Bend over all my sense.
Blackbird to blackbird calls there
And shakes wet wings
By tributary stream to stream that falls there.

I at the door see, hear,
But may not enter.
Nothing to me is strange there,
But nothing's mine
Save unconstrainèd thoughts that range there.

Yet there I remember
All that was dear,
All that in childhood grew there;
And recognize
The beauty I knew not I knew there.

O starry door
I may not enter !
By day and night I come there
Because there only
Is my desire, and my spirit's home there :

Because there only is one
I would behold,
Moving like a tree there
Or bird or flower ;—
Or the very Unseen I may see there.

THERE THE NEGLECTED HEDGEROWS

THERE the neglected hedgerows ruddier are
Than hedges tortured by coarse mortal care.
More beautiful in the late October sun
The showering beech, and tall elms one by one
Slow heaving, and more beautiful the stream
Of leafy willows over the water's gleam
Than trees by mortal eyes beheld may seem.
Huge there the hills from gilded valleys rise
Eternally green against cloud-netted skies,
Dark green or lighter green, but graver hued
Always than hills with common light endued.
And where the fretful lapwing lifts and falls
And lonely out of lonely leagues still calls,
Silence enlarges in the hollow intervals.

Who is it walks there, blessing the blossomy light
Upon the trees and thicket sevenfold bright ?
Black are the shining berries, crimson haws
Glitter above yellow boughs. A light wind flaws
The burning thicket ; in tormenting vain
It showers upon his feet and flutters again
Dead leaves to be consumed in frost and rain.
There if he speak the wind and leaves reply ;
Only his shadow moves in company,
And cloudy shadows flowing overhead.
And if he sing, for song is never fled,
No answering song save echo calm is heard
Or that half-earthly music of the bird,
Or syllabling of grasses by the wind stirred.
Else silent all. And utmost silence when
In gray dawn, and when eve is gold again
After loud storm, moves tall upon the hill,

Shade-footed, even than shadow quieter still,
His nameless Master with serener gaze,
Moving in windlike elemental ways
Between the starry dance of nights and days.
—Unto what end none knows, nor ever knew.
Him that inhabitant first seeing flew
Fearful, and all night trembled in his sleep,
In mortal imaginations lapsing deep.
But again the measureless apparition came
And, pausing, breathed a clear and human name,
Then darkened as smoke darkens after flame.
Since then in what swift elemental way
His spirit's Lord move or by night or day,
Known is he and bright worship follows near :
Even the brief apparition is grown dear.
For was it not his rainlike passage gave
The flagrant hues to this late Autumn wave
Washing tall hedges, and the hills green and grave ?
Was it not his foot I heard this morning sweep
Through the fall'n leaves, his cloudy streamed hair strip
The last boughs ? Was it not his lips that breathed
The wandering music and the high clouds wreathed
In the unstable likeness of these hills ?
His gentler voice that in shy-stepping rills
Falls now and on the Plain its watery echo spills ?

'Tis here the hedges bloom with a new fire,
The same that flushed my bosom with desire.
Here now the grasses lift with a new song
That in my throat has silent been too long.
But when like senseless orbs the hill-pools stare,
And showering leaves still fall, and lean and bare
The hedgerows shrink, and none to see or care,
And silence 'mid lone winds a mockery is,

And whatever comes, or comes not, seems amiss ;
Then even these splendours are a sunless cheat,
And nothing more than nothingness is sweet.
Then moodily along the hills to stalk
Is bitter, and to want familiar talk,
Or a loved human hand, and silent walk.

SONG OF RENEWAL

I

I WALKÉD near sunset through wet fields towards the leafless beechen shaws
That no more warmed the air with fire and gave new colours to the sun.
I saw a man that digged with spade all silver in the silver light,
Heaping the soft clay on the grass. His eyes with the same pale light shone.

Each looked at each, and to my eye he answered: "I am digging a grave,
Needs must be deep, and time is short, and cloudy night comes on apace.
And weary, weary is digging, for I've digged a hundred wasted graves,
And this must deeper be than any digged in other fields and days."

Each looked at each, and to my eye he answered: "'Tis the past I bury,
Buried already thrice and thrice and thrice a hundred times in vain;
Buried in cities sunken deep by the restless worm's uprising,
And watery cities whose green-weedy streets no step may wake again;

"And in the darkened mountain caves, where all the frozen winds find way,
And where eternal roots of trees are ribbed about the breast of earth;

And in those lonely isles amid the mist and waves of northern seas :—
Buried a hundred times ; a hundred times from vain burial broken forth.

" And now, on this cold hillside, where so many a past forgot is buried,
English, Roman, Iberian, I dig another deeper grave
To bury the new-dead past, the past that in few years engulfed the earth
With sorrow, and pained darkness, and made the earth one grave."

" O deeper, dig deeper, yet never deep enough,"
I answered as he lifted slow his silver spade and thrust.
" Deeper, deeper, deeper, but never deep enough to hide—
The bones that you would bury there will never turn to dust."

II

I walked the fields when morning freshened. All the long and lovely hills,
Were slipping thin clouds from their heads, shaking, lifting in the light—
The miles and miles of hills embayed and mounded high on either hand,
And before me the dark Malverns and the Welsh hills faint in sight.

The greening woods behind me made a bright reed-music in the wind

As I climbed the stile and crossed the field. I had forgot
'twas here
That lonely figure digged ; but here his empty work un-
finished lay,
His spade long-rusted in the running grass ; and he was
nowhere near.

Who was it now was treading near ? A young man straight
and bright who stepped
Against the sun's light up the hill, the sun's light in his eyes
and hair.
He rose as fresh as grasses rise that the sun fingers after
rain ;
As he came near I heard him sing some half-forgot old
country air.

Each looked at each, and to his eye I answered : " In that
shallow trench
Last winter stood a man who digged a grave for the unburied
past.
His silver spade heaped up the clay, but now the clay sinks
back again,
And still, I know, the naked past unburied on the wide
land's cast."

Each looked at each, and to my eye he answered : " Let the
dead bury its dead !
Earth's lovely weed o'ercovers all the deaths of all her
myriad brood.
Rain washes wise forgetfulness, and clouds their kindly
darkness wave ;
Morn springs again, and out of sleep man's generations rise
renewed.

" See how the children cross the fields below, shouting and playing there.
One stoops for cowslips and one holds in cuplike hands their yellow flowers.
They would but dance in this vain grave with, ' Let's pretend this is a grave,
And I'm the digger, you the corpse, and Tom's the rector, and here's flowers.' "

Each looked at each. " It is too hard," he said, " to keep the past alive,
And live. Let the past be forgot as storms that leave the drenched earth sad,
Till after grey dawn dense clouds thin with the new wind, and men bestir,
And ruined spring renews her flower and anxious eyes are once more glad."

III

Following his look, I saw the Vale shaking its miles-long flower of pear,
And village smoke like darker bloom, and distant steam's white-flying mane.
The hills were throbbing, and the light quickened and quivered on the green,
And " New, new, new ! " a shrill thrush sang, and " New, new, new ! " the larks again.

I took the rusted spade and turned the clay back to its bed of clay.
The grass was yellow where the clay had crushed it all the winter through.

He stood beside me as I bent, each silent for the singing thought
That sang in every nerve and cell reiterating " New, new, new ! "

I ended, and he moved away, half substance and half visionary,
Disappearing in the trees, the grass, the flowers, and wind that in them blew.
I remembered him but young and bright, and in his fading hands and brow
Faint marks renewed where Love burned through, how many centuries ago !

THE EPITAPH

When the last rites are done and only wreaths
Of memory remain to cast, that lie
Tarnishing in frost and add their many deaths
To the one death, for soon dies memory,
Let justice speak for him, pity be still,
Against miry faults be one clear virtue set
Like starling whistling on the snowy sill
When all wings else are parted or forget.
Let justice say—" The grave shall make amends
For every wrong ; but warm-housed in his breast
Many belovèd lay, kindred and friends,
River, mead, cloud, lone hill's ash-plumèd crest."
Let justice breathe—" Sing, memory, unreproved,
Sing yet a moment, saying ' He loved, he loved ! ' "

INDUCTION. *The Muse speaks*

I THE Muse am, but who would know me needs
Look gently upon these worn and woeful weeds.
Bramble hath snared me, briar about my hands
Sharp torment drawn ; in waste and hungry lands
Long have I wandered, none to friend or follow,
Where scummy waters stale and from a hollow
Branch-cumbered cliff misshapen dwarves outcreep
With knobby staves and notes uncouth that strip
Speech of all kindness, though for speech I thirst
As Eve when the Snake's guile her bosom nursed.
Few have regarded me, or with surprise
Seeing, have murmured,—" No, no ! For the Muse lies
Dead, half-forgot, her early honours ended.
This is not she whose young voice sweet or splendid
The centuries heard. Our English Muse is fled,
And the enlarging and ebbing echo dead
Long since. These harsh notes are not hers, nor these
Slow pacings, nor the wan lids' timidities.
Sing we her flight, sing we her far foot falling
By mount and stream and mead—gone past recalling ;
Breathe elegy, figure her spirit in stone
Carved in huge quarry side, gleaming alone,
Severe, in solemn eve, with wide blank orbs ;
Or flute wake the wild music that absorbs
All of the brain but memory of sweet,
Brief sense of fading light and darkening heat."

So have I heard them faithful faithless sigh,
Negligent eyes have drooped as they passed by.

But I, drawn hither out of southern shires
Fringed by the cloud of labour's clustered fires,
Anon have paused where dear my sons have strayed,
Or sleep, and brushed their memory with my shade
Rainlike reviving. Gently have I stepped
While the weed-washing Thames beside me slipped,
And lightly dreamlike Laon and Cythna floated
Save of the startled heron's eye unnoted,
Soft as a sunbeam nursed on swimming mist ;
Have paused long where, thrush-like, the Elegist
Slept till I neared and trembled as I went
On through June's gilded meads and freshening scent ;
And where the stream narrows through greener land
And the flushed towers of my gray votary stand,
And the river's self and the river paths have known
Another flowing melody, sweeter tone
Than the willow-haunting breasts have wit to sing.
For even as their thin ranging reed-notes fling
Music from bank to footless bank, so airs
Remoter pour from hushing distant years—
From mine own singers out of the darkened past
Over the flowing generations cast
Hither.

And leaving then the lyric meads,
Threading the new-tongued woods, and the gray steads
Whose walls are story, midland villages
Clinging the hills as children round the knees
Of a calm mother, late at eve I came
Above yon Cotswold town. I watched the flame
Slowly and utterly perish in the sky,
And those minute, immenser flames ride high
Above the north and nodding from the helms
Of Kings that ride unchallenged through the realms

Of subject kings whose lashes o'er shamed eyes
Droop slowly darkening at indignities
Flung down from vast and cold dismaying heights.
  But bravely glowed the few pale yellow lights
From the near town, through lattice wide to take
The cooler air when lime and chestnut shake
Shadow and scent on the long, quiet street,
And scent and shadow mingle in spiritual sweet.

  Soft-tongued the voices through the lattice slipt:
As soft, as clear, bat, owl and swift rabbit whipt
From shadow to shadow as I passed from the town
Up, and on the hill-slopes turned and then sank down
In the great owl-fluttered tithe-barn, and slept there.
When Morning lifted wide eyes on the wet air
I rose, watching her move from ridge to ridge
While my feet strayed upon this black-plumed edge—
Sad, restless plumes of wintry scape—then fell
Where the west road falls.

Nought now is mine to tell;
For these, born in the parish of my delight,
Untaught will speak—not of imaginations bright,
But all of common things: as love and tears,
The inner cloud of pain, and sharper fears.
Unhappy happy he that never such notes hears.

Scene One

(*A green-covered cottage in a Cotswold hamlet. Rooms have been added to the back at several times, so that the cottage now extends into the garden like one side of a short street. It is surrounded with glass-houses and flower beds, neat,*

but without pleasantness in their order, for the plants are grown merely for the flowers to be cut and sold. Fruit is ripening under the misted roofs of some of the glass-houses; else there is little alive save in the beds between the roofs.

A woman comes from the cottage and crosses the flagged path; she dips a heavy bucket into the water-tank and empties it upon a thirsty bed. She is about forty, with pale eyes, thin hair and clear ruddy skin drawn tight over high cheek bones. Her name is HESTER.

After looking steadily ahead, she turns and dips again for water, which she carries with ease to the stable. She sets it down at the door.)

HESTER. Andrew is gone. Rising early yester dawn
He crushed the sparkling dews that load the lawn.
The mare stamped *Welcome* on the stable floor
Hearing her master's hand rattling the door,
And then his voice, and then the harness clank.
I heard and saw—outleaning over the dank
High-bosomed clematis—the swaying cart
Thrust with its hood wet beaded boughs apart,
And Andrew's voice again, and the snuffing mare
Shaking a faint grey mist upon chilly air.
As the cart down into the road-ruts turned
I saw the hooded load: the flowers that burned
The buds that slept, still half-sealed; and all those
That burdened the slow-drifting air with rose
Of heavy scent: plumbago, heliotrope,
The sweet-breath'd peas, fuschias flame-lipped that drop
Deep purple fire, pied stock, green mignonette,
And hair-like fern spreading a thin strong net
Over all but the warring and mingling smells.
Gone is that sweet. But not so quick dispels

My memory, my care, that each with each
Mingling and warring shut my mind from speech.
Heavy the hours have grown. The mists that close
November days (when not the least wind strows
The ruddied bramble leaves on silver'd lanes,
And faint-green'd furrows glitter with sliding rains)
Draw not more stealthy than the tongueless air
Between us, till sharp silence everywhere
Moans senselessly.
Here, long years ago,
Against the doorpost—still the notches show—
Andrew and I measuring each other's growth
Stood often, while he chided me for sloth
As his swift inches mounted above mine.
Can I forget ? Now chiding were divine
As music swelling slowly through the room.
Here music oft has washed the winter gloom
With bright waves, till the swelling, falling flood
Broke through the warm-vein'd flesh and filled my blood
With new delight of old notes and old songs
Whose rich delays the quivering nerve prolongs.
'Twas Andrew's harp—now many months forsaken,
Wrapped in its shroud, and no hand to awaken
The entombed melody like Lazarus shaken
By Jesus' voice from sleep. Long winter nights,
When snow gleams on the barrows and farther heights,
Or rain on glass-roof'd acres angrily
Spatters and gurgles, and winds are hoarse or high ;
Long winter nights he'd pluck the sleeping string
And early-loved brief airs at whiles would sing.
Then my voice too would please, quick interweaving
With his and the harp's singing, so deceiving
The hours.

Now my voice pleases not. No speech,
No song sometime beloved, has spell to reach
The duskèd lamp that was his spirit clear.
I speak—and speak oft to a trancèd ear.
I cannot touch his buried mind. I know
Care burrows wormlike busily to and fro—
I trace its motion in his restless eye:
At a sudden sound it flickers piteously.
Yet still he speaks not—what I dare not ask;
His countenance is a dumb and chilling mask
By dull flames lit. Chin peaked upon great palm,
Or drooped, and eyes drooped, in vain cheat of calm
He sits, as though all sense and soul were deaf
With inward murmuring like ocean's. If
I too that murmuring heard, then might we be
Re-knit in happy or wretched harmony.
—No more, let be. My gossip comes anon
Whose glib and eager voice falls pleasant on
My vacant ear; for any word were kind
That filled the nervous hollows of the mind.

(*Enter* LETTY, *a short, stout, hale-looking woman of about seventy years. She fans herself as she smiles and puffs, and still smiles as she sits down.*)

LETTY. All this week, Hester, have I awaited you,
And now am come because a fancy drew
Hither my idle steps to know what stayed
Your coming, so long promised. I was afraid
That something I could guess not, good or ill,
Kept you, and so I climbed the long steep hill
Before the sun was hot. Now I am here
It seems your face gives warrant for my fear. . . .

Are my eyes ailing, or are yours dim and wet?
Never, when you a child were, did you fret
Or greet; your look was calm then as these flowers:
Now 'tis as when their heads by angry showers
Are bent to the earth.
Tell me, as here I sit,
If telling gives you ease, the while I knit;
Or if you cannot speak—for I know well
How trouble felt too deep is hard to tell—
Then let me talk on still.

. . . . .

At last, they say,
On yon embankment men begin to lay
The railroad track; indeed, it seemed the clanging
Of distant metals sounded hither, hanging
Harshly awhile upon the eastward wind.
If the way ran—as once did threat—behind
Your apple orchard, then crawled through the hill,
You'd hear the trains day and night, now hoarse, now shrill,
Bellowing or screaming in their speed.
How then
Andrew would chafe, and your old cottage when
The loaded trains climbed up would quake and quake—
I love the queer old place for its own sake!
My mother told me, when she was but a child
She used to hang on the gate as the men tiled
The new roof, with your grandfather looking on.
It's many a year since then, and they've all gone—
All gone; but the cottage as they left it stands.
Aye, and 'tis older than their work; the hands
That built the first walls had long, long before
Ceased building when my mother scrambled o'er
The gate to see the last roof tiled.

HESTER. 'Tis all
That's left of them, this roof, porch, timber, wall——

LETTY. And you, your brother, you too have they made
Who built and lived here. Why, when Andrew played—
You mind me now—hereabout and beyond,
My mother, an old, old woman then, grew fond
To see the boy because, she said, 'twas plain
His grandfather in him was alive again
With the same-set eyes and the tight mottled skin
—Something like yours, Hester—the mouth sucked in
Just as I know him now.
Ah, do I tease
Unknowing? Forgive me: you are ill at ease
And I go babbling on like water bubbling,
And if one listens or not, why, little troubling.
But I will not stay. Old fondness bade me come,
And a lonely woman's hate of being dumb.
Andrew will soon be here.

HESTER. No, no, stay yet.
Hearing your voice, dear Letty, I forget
Much that I would forget. This silence is
A lesson learned too soon, not sullenness. . . .
But hark! What wheels are they? The gate's flung back,
The wain returns. Stand here—O look! how slack
His shoulders; like a broken aged man
He walks unseeing, or as if all things ran
Unreal on, or crawled too slowly past,
Too sorely.

LETTY. Long 'tis since I saw him last.
(*To herself.*) Change, change! There's such a shadow in
his eyes,

And see, ah, what a line it is that lies
Above them. Like a man in the black of night
He walks, and in his fixed look there's no light.
O pity, what can it be has struck him so ?
I never saw. . . .
Yes, Hester, my dear, I'll go.
To-morrow I'll return, maybe, to speak
Or listen ; but now no more.

Scene Two

(*A seat in the garden, near the butt into which the roof-water is collected.* Hester *and* Letty *are seated there.*)

Hester. It was last night. I woke and heard the stair
From Andrew's room that groaned on the quiet air ;
And I sprang up and crept to the door. The moon
Made a faint brightness. So I listened. Soon
Footsteps I heard below and then could see,
As I stepped down, my brother silently
Crossing the parlour and anon standing still,
Or slowly swaying. Cloud-latticed light did fill
The room with swimming shadow as he stepped
Near to the harp that in the corner, wrapped
In its old cover, leaned against the wall.
And I was minded to follow him or call
From the staircase where I bent down, peering in ;
But the dim moon, creeping the shadows between,
The changing shadows that now were soft, now sharp,
And Andrew swaying uncertain before the harp
As if he saw it and then saw it not,
Remembered a moment and as soon forgot—

It made me tremble, and I mutely hung
Over the rail and looked.
At last he flung
A hand on the harp and drew it tenderly to him
As he sat on the bench ; a sigh swept visibly through him
Before I heard it loosened upon the air—
So deep that sigh, or such a hopeless prayer !
And then, his fingers twitching at the shroud,
He rose—least movement in that hush were loud,
Louder my heart—and slowly drew it ; then
Sat and bent him over the harp again
With such caresses as the wind might use
On a wind harp ; even so did Andrew muse
With whispering fingers ere he touched the wires . . .
If dreams had skill to play, or had desires
Cunning of practised hand ! But Andrew long
Had left the harp neglected, and no song
Born in some hour of rest or sweet unrest
These many days was cradled upon its breast.
Slack were the wires now, but he plucked awhile,
And keyed and sounded—at first with a vague smile,
So rare his smiles ! and then with ruckled brow
Listening perplexed to notes near full, and now
Low falling, and his dreaming head fall'n too
As if from floor or very earth he drew
Old melody once that now delusive flew.
Once more his fingers over the wrest-pins roved,
His foot again from pedal to pedal moved,
And all alike now blindly. For the notes fell
Imperfect and disordered : I could tell
(Now drawing closer, by the door-post crouched)
The senseless mind knew not what the hand touched,
Or the sleeping ear no bliss brought to the mind
If sweetness chanced from fingering undesigned.

Yet 'twas not this, dear Letty, frightened me.
But when his hands dropped so despairingly,
And in his eyes that saw not my grieved eyes
I marked the dreaming spirit's sad surmise,
The hopeless sense that 'neath his fled sense stirred,
'Twas then, I hopeless too, 'twas then I feared.
I moved and caught his hand, and something spoke:
A moment he stood swaying, and slowly woke,
Looked round—and from the room, the harp unshrouded,
The stroke of the clock, my face, the moon thin-clouded
And the thrilled air, caught wildly all that passed.
O then his eyes, O then his voice that cast
Unmeaning words in dazed and quick appeal!
Even as I drew him close to me I could feel
His bosom's thunder. "Hester, Hester!" he cried
When speech came clear; and I pressed him to my side,
And no more answering led him so away.
Now sleeps he deep and still since break of day.

LETTY. If words had any healing——

HESTER. O, if words
No sweetness have like music's trembling chords,
Then indeed stand I lonely in distress;
But dear your voice falls on the bitterness
Of pain uncomprehended.

LETTY. Ah, I am old,
Dear Hester, and aught I say must seem how cold!
All my long years have flown away from me
Carrying what I loved. And yet I see
Everything still as it was for younger faces;
Some go, but others rise up in their places.

HESTER. But here, where all the past has dwindled down
To two, and over us some threat unknown——

LETTY. Yet Time is gentle, Hester, giving and taking
And giving then anew. . . . Nay, you are shaking
Your sorrowful head! I know how trouble creeps
All round one's heart, yet in the end it sleeps
And quiet comes again.

HESTER. But ah, for me
What passes nor what nears is yet to see.
Scarce now I know what Time has torn apart:
Something, some ill, has swarmed in Andrew's heart
And into mine has crawled, but nameless still.
Your griefs were yours, my ill is yet my ill—
Not less that yours has gone. . . . Forgive me this.
I cannot think—I feel, I look, I miss.
—Hark, Andrew stirs, he calls. . . . Yes, I am here,
I come!

SCENE THREE

(*A room above the sitting-room.* ANDREW *is seated in a chair, facing the window.* HESTER *stands a moment before him, and then sits.*)

ANDREW. No, do not speak—'tis I will speak. I know
Last night you stayed me as I moved below
Sleep-wandering, and awoke me. What I dreamed,
'Twas that you saw, and truth was what it seemed.
Yes, Hester, when to the harp my fingers crept,
When my mind wakened, while the body slept,
When I bent close yet scarce could hear the ringing
Of any wire, and while my hand was clinging
Fondly, 'twas all bewildered and its skill
Was lost, and if I heard I heard but ill,
And feared to listen again and yet would hear
Though all I heard was but a throbbing fear.

That dream was true—Hester, the dream is true . . .
No, less than the truth. For slowly, slowly grew
My fear, my sense, my certainty, until
Full certainty has come. Yes, all the while
That you lamented a new loneliness
And silence spread between us, and distress
Darkened your face, I knew my hearing failing;
All low and delicate sounds fell unavailing.
Might nothing break or shake the senses' gloom?—
Often and often hastening to the room
In your watched absence turned I to the harp
To call up music; and my nerves all sharp
Were but as strings for fear to play upon
His wild and cunning airs that lingered on
My secret mind, loud swelling as you returned;
Until I murmured, "Hester has surely learned
By sight, or inward sense of things unseen,
This"—that I tell now. But your look serene
In seeming bid the bitter phantoms fly,
And your lips' motion and voice slow and high
Whispered a faint intelligence that I caught
Painfully, with a mind unfixed, distraught,
Like a lost herd wandering in mist and marsh.
I know how then my answer, sudden and harsh,
Fell often upon you with an edged surprise
Though no reproach came but from grieving eyes
That met mine momently withdrawing.

HESTER. No,
Except these eyes perverse made senseless show
Of unfelt smart, reproach sprang never there.

ANDREW. Enough . . . But I was ridden by despair.
By day I gloomed, by night I dreamed or, waking,

Could feel the thin walls of my being shaking
While soundless apprehensions struck——

HESTER. O stay!
Were life but void with music's self away,
Were voices sweet, and naught else living sweet—
Then, then were grief in flood, despair complete.
Andrew, though now my voice be faintly heard,
Is it by voice alone that the heart is stirred?
Needs memory thunder-shocks? These many years
That in our bosom lie, untossed by fears,
Must all these founder and forgotten be?
—O, the cold thoughts that make a stone of me!
But touch and smell and season-following sight
Of the unwithering world, and dark and light,
And all things sweet to the eye and quick to the hand
Remain——

ANDREW. O Hester, words are soft as sand;
Though fondness speak, 'tis words . . . Now understand!
Last night you broke my dream, but other dreams
Returning lit my sleep with wilder gleams;
Unwilled, imagination woke and made
Strange and familiar an inconstant Shade.
Watching that trembling Shade I also trembled,
Into my likeness out of dust assembled,
Or dust and mist, my mocking shape I knew.
He stood, and as I watched, dark'd and withdrew
Again in mist and dust; then again knit,
Even as I spoke, in semblance quick, complete,
And passed before me. But he could not hear
Though in my stormy head my voice swelled near
As never waking; nor his eyes gave sign
When I approached his trembling shape with mine.

Spoke I or moved he could not hear nor see,
Shaking like grass as if in terror of me,
While still he held me with appeal intense
Past any prayer flung through the gates of sense,
Half-still and sightless now. What answer made
My startled heart? I know not—I saw fade
Into a throng of shades that mirrored Shade.

HESTER. If visions were true, not as wild smoke and vain
Uncurled when sleeps the spirit, and the brain
Burns lawless on——

ANDREW. Hester, the dream was true!
That dying, sharpening shape wore my own hue,
Moved with my step, was quick with my own blood;
He with me, in me, by the dumb harp stood,
Longing and baffled—all of that heaven removed,
Broken and muted, never so sore beloved.
In his lone aspect, mute and deaf and blind
Myself I saw, and all my life behind
And all that death before me. With him I
Shall cast like leaves my senses, till they lie
Slow-rotting leaves around a dying tree.
So hearing hushes, sight dims, touch and smell
Decay, and shut me in a narrow hell.
By sense I lived, and sense gone what is left?
A cold worm in a mossy oak's dark cleft
Has more of life in more of hope.

HESTER. Yet still
Hope that has been may rouse again and fill
Your painful thoughts anew.

ANDREW. Nothing comes anew;
Not even lying hope, in guise of true,
Once fled, returns. Listen—week after week
Believing and disbelieving did I seek
If any hope remained; and none remained.
Each time I drove the market-load I reined
The horses in returning at the door
Of the new hospital, where shivering, poor,
Pitiful mortals, sick of hoping, waited.
Week after week I too, deluded, fated,
Nursed a wan hope soon waxing, soon abated.
Subtle physicians puckered their wise brows,
Questioned and whispered and then sought to rouse
The sleepy nerves with quick magnetic wire,
Or potent drugs—all impotent as desire
To satisfy desire. Week after week
Silent I waited, then besought them speak,
And still they silence kept; while all things dimming
Slowly around me, farther, fainter swimming
From present sense, left me in a dark cave
Silent and deep and wormy as the grave . . .
You know the caves that once we stumbled through,
Haunted and echoing, when I supported you
In trembling, how they smelt of worms and damp
And dead things; yet we feared the light of the lamp
And swinging shadows, and on those worms to tread.
It seems now those caves wind into my head,
And every thought's a worm from which I shrink,
And I fear to look; but spite of fear I think,
I look.

Then, Hester, when night after night
That inward image, gradually growing bright
And plain, drew closer (that was never so plain
As last night) hope I knew at length was vain,

And from those lying doctors slowly wrung
This, that is true—that ear and eye and tongue,
Each nervous sense——
O, now your hand in mine
Thus laid to hush me with its gentle sign !—
Yes, Hester, sight and hearing, trees and flowers,
Voices and music, these that will yet be yours,
Are mine no more. I shall be like the dead,
A ghost from which all but harsh memory's fled.
How might you endure the mock of death so near,
That death might mend ?

HESTER. Andrew !

ANDREW. My dear, my dear,
Give back your startled hand, I will forbear ;
I have said too much—it is my nerves have spoken.
Ah, was not silence better, the unbroken
Stillness that muffled the heart's cry of pain ?
I will try not to speak so truly again.

HESTER. Andrew !

ANDREW. Your fondness leaps in this quick clutch.
So little have you taken and given so much,
Silence were kindness ; and I babble on ;
But never again, maybe, and this hour gone.
Now there is anger and folly rising within
My heart, and I could cry, What was my sin ?
What jealous God has visited sins on me
That others wrought ? Lechers will lechers be,
Thieves thieves, liars will be liars, God will be God
Delighting to pour death into living blood.
Quicksilver death into mine has He poured.

Because I have lived clean—I have not whored,
Coveted, betrayed, did He say, I will make
Virtue a crime to follow for its own sake ?
O Hester, thoughts like these I have suppressed
So long—another poison in my breast—
That I must speak them now though all I say
Seem like some other's tongue. To curse, to pray
Is equal blasphemy. . . . Let this subside.
Again in caves of silence will I hide
Among those worms of thought.

HESTER. But never alone.
Read in my face, feel in my hand the tone
Of truest vow—I am with you, Andrew, still.
Can there be ill for you that's not my ill ?
Let me be eyes for you, voice and hearing yet.
O that I might in your cold gloom be lit—
A lamp, a warmth, to flood you with such glow
As never till now your need might ask, and know.
Yes, take of me all that is mine and all,
All that I am, senses and wit, and call
Never in vain for mine or me . . .
My dear,
Are not these vows all needless ? I am here.

. . . . .

ANDREW. O when I sit thus and you sit by me
And thought flows on between us silently
Till it seems easier so to sit and think
While all that anger and indignation sink,
And let the justice of the world be still
Called justice, as in mockery it will :
So in the hush of all but the waked mind
Maybe—maybe—I could endurance find.

But you, the sister of my blood and brain,
That you should into me shrink, ache with my pain,
Increase your loneliness with weight of mine,
Senses and wit subdue to childish sign,
O pity! That you should give and I should take
Such sacrifice for love's unanswering sake.
If this be love life is not worth love.

HESTER. No,
Nor love worth life if it could measure so,
Here less, here more. It is my bosom's need
To spend, not weigh, pour out, heap up, nor heed
Though you give much or little to requite . . .
I can say no more. We have spoken at such a height
I am tired, and talk is wasted when all's plain.
Now let us back to common things.

ANDREW. In vain
To talk of common things and think of death,
Though that is common too as air and breath,
To think, yet not to think upon the one
Escape, the sole bliss left to think upon——

HESTER. Andrew!

ANDREW. The sole bliss——

HESTER. Andrew!

ANDREW. The one escape.
How should I talk of lesser things and shape
New hopes, shut in a prison all deaf and blind,
Night of the senses, utter night of the mind?
Add to your grief but one grief more, and then—
And then no more. You will have peace again.

HESTER. No, never again, if this—but it is not true.
O hush these thoughts that make a stranger of you;
Hush these wild thoughts.

ANDREW. They are all that I hear,
But I will hush. Now leave me, Hester; fear,
Fear nothing—O, you know not what you fear. . . .
Maybe I shall sleep again now. Let me sleep.
Leave me—ah, do not let me see you weep.

SCENE FOUR

(*A day later.* HESTER *and* LETTY *in the sitting-room.*)

LETTY. Never in all my days, never heard I
Such sorrowful tidings. Alas, how witlessly
Seems the world move! Idiot children thrive
As they were the happiest folk of all alive:—
You know the Weddells, dear, scarce a mile hence,
With all the body's senses but the one sense
Of the sound mind—idiots all, but hale
In bone and flesh, and not a care to ail.
But Andrew, wanting their misgiven strength,
May live but death-like till death comes at length.
—I am not used to thoughts like these, 'tis ill,
Maybe, to speak them now; but speak I will;
Such things to hear makes what was right seem wrong,
Innocents weak, and only the wicked strong.

HESTER. I too such thoughts have known, such thoughts put by,
Such things my brother has breathed, oh, bitterly.
Speak them not, Letty, speak nor think them not.
I would that thoughts like these were all forgot
Before words gave them wings.

But now no more.
Andrew will come anon—I heard his door.
Your village news will teach him to forget
(If aught may teach) awhile his pain and fret.

LETTY. Ah, Hester, you are wiser and better than I
For all my age.
Well, if he comes, I'll try.
He used to be so angry if I spoke
Against Squire Marten and the Manor folk,
With that Crimea maimed pair tramping on
When the Squire whistled his dog and cried, *Begone!*
Mayhap 'twill amuse him now to hear the tale
Of the young Master and little Nancy Male—
Half of it you know, but I know all of it now:
How the two raging fathers met, and how
Young Master and Nancy stood together, waiting,
Hearing them swearing and one another rating . . .
Andrew will laugh!

HESTER. I will get him to come down—
I can't endure the thought of him sitting alone.

HESTER *leaves the room and in a moment is heard calling*—
Letty, Letty—O come!

LETTY *follows* HESTER *upstairs*, HESTER *crying*— Look, look, look!

(ANDREW *is found hanging from a beam over the door of his room. The body sways a little, and after* HESTER'S *cry there is one moment of intense silence; then she whispers*)—

Stand on the chair—quick, slip the rope from the hook
While I lift him—so! Ah, he is cold, he is cold!

Was it this, Andrew, that your words foretold
When you said, *One grief more* ? 'Twas I was blind
That could not, would not peer within your mind
To look at—this, that unaccomplished lay
Before you when you spoke.

(*She looks round as* LETTY *hastens from the room.*)

Yes, Letty, away
For the doctor—bid the doctor wake the dead.

(*And now alone, she stretches herself beside the body, pressing it to her.*)

O Andrew, close !
Cold, cold, cold—breast and head,
Cold hands, cheeks, lips, cold all from brow to feet.
If I could warm you with my wasting heat,
Give you my breath, O give you this poor sense,
Unneeded eyes and ears, intelligence
Of living things again, O dear and dead
Brother !
Was it my giving that you fled ?
Is love, too, wasted, even as ears and eyes ?
Then with the body's senses all else dies.
But I live on and must live and still keep
Despair at heel ; you shall not hear me weep
After a little. O, in my heart yet stay
Never again shall you slip unwatched away.

—Keep from me, childish thoughts, mind me not now
Of then, when Andrew and I were children. How
Bear it, and you my brother lying so
Cold and distant.
Hush, hush, hush !

(*She kisses the lips, then rises and is putting* ANDREW'S *clothes in order when* LETTY *returns with the doctor.*)

LETTY (*calling softly*). Where are you, Hester? Hester, where are you?

HESTER. Here.

LETTY—Now God be praised! Doctor, I had such fear.
—Look, that's the harp he used to play.
(*To herself, as the doctor goes upstairs.*) How lonely
Will all these rooms be now, and Hester only
Left here of them that years and years ago. . . .

EPILOGUE

THE MUSE. Forgive me, Princes, that of grief I speak,
But I have seen wan Sorrow's graying cheek;
Have in her footsteps trodden where bruised grasses
Show how o'erburdened heavily she passes
Unheeding the sweet water'd western valleys
Where Spring comes early, and long Autumn dallies
Loth to leave lands she never may forget—
Forget! A word that Sorrow never yet
Endured to hear.
And now no more I linger.
Soon from the square Tower will the plaintive finger
Of the thin bell spread whispers upon the air,
And that sharp Spire will answer across the bare,
Steep fields,
The wind will after Sorrow's feet
Lifting the grass, and the air once more be sweet.

PART III

THREE

I

This is the thing—why doesn't he move ? this limp
Knot of young vileness.—Are you afraid, afraid,
Afraid, afraid ? You didn't fear yesterday,
And now you are limp with fear ; why weren't you afraid
Yesterday, and all the days and nights when fear
Might have saved you ? But it can't save you now.
Stand aside, Tom, leave him to me : he's afraid
To speak to me, afraid to move his eyes
From mine, or answer with a single word ;
It sickens me, this filthiness with this fear.
If he'd but speak. . . . I can't hit a dumb man.
Damn your eyes if you won't take them off me ; stop
Staring so. It's like the rabbits I killed
When the noisy reaping machine narrowed the corn :
You know, Tom, at the last how they rush out,
Rats, and rabbits that run shrieking away
Or crouch and just look at you with moist eyes,
Deceiving you to pity—vermin, that swell
On stolen corn. You vermin, you with eyes
Moist as a rabbit's, take them off me, shriek
And run, and I'll knock you down.
O, Tom ! but see
What beastliness can do. It makes me rave
As I were a villain crying, " So help me God,
Not guilty ! " And to touch him makes me beastly,
And to look at him fills me with verminous thoughts,
Till I crawl and sicken to think such things should live.
O, we shan't need the rope, he's afraid to run.
I would to God he'd run, and I'd after him
And with a single blow. . . .

Or let him alone !
Take off your clothes. Look, Tom, look at his arms.
No wonder he's afraid. Don't touch, or he'll break.
Take them off, every rag.—Look at that chest and neck.
—Off, I tell you, every stitch. What's that thing hanging
Round your neck, that chain and thing ? I mean to see.
Though it's the face of my own wife, I shall look
To see what smile she gave with it for you. . . .
It isn't her face—whose is it ? Your mother's, eh ?
— He nods, Tom. It's his mother's picture he wore
When he came serpentining round my wife.
The vileness, to wear this, and yet do that !
— Keep it on, lecher, if you believe in charms.
You'll need a charm against this magic of mine,
Black magic. Do you know the smell of tar ?
It's said to be health and sweetness to the lungs.
They make saccharine from tar, drugs, aniline dyes
Of splendid colours. I expect Grace's silks
Are dyed with tar dyes. Those silks you know, not I.
But there's only the one colour tar has for you—
Black. This is meant to dye you black,
Black inwards, so black outwards. It's a dye
To be humorous about if you're in the vein,
As I am now. Many an Ethiopian
Might covet your black brightness in the shine
Of this lascivious Moon.
Now, a touch here—keep still, devil. I'm not
Artist enough as yet to steady my hand
As artists must.

So ! I wonder
Desdemona could have loved one not so black
By far, for beauty lives in blackness ; and Othello,
Othello was but half black . . .
Look how the light glides brightening his blackness—

Look, Tom ! I'll turn him face to face with the Moon,
Staring at each other as he stared at *her*.
O, I am mad, or wishing I were mad
To do such things as madmen do—destroy.
He makes me coward, and like a coward confused
By my own tongue. What would Grace say now
To see him so ? Would she, like the foul Moon,
Pour her old devilish sweetness over him,
Silver him with her false, fond light ? By God,
Fetch her, Tom, fetch her, fetch her quickly. What,
You won't ? Then watch here while I bring her—
What, you won't ? Well, I am raving again.
Is it strange to you that I should rave, as if
To whip myself into unnatural anger ?
I exaggerate everything—yes. This filthy thing
Has that power over me with his silence and
His staring eyes, that I exaggerate agony
And anger and everything honest else.
But O
That he were dead and she ; or I and she !
Was that some one moving, Tom ? A footstep near,
Or a rotted, falling bark ? Let's finish this.
Give me the feathers . . . No, it's late for talk,
Let's do it and have done. Tar without feathers
May seem pathetic and scarce ridiculous
Enough ; but tar and feathers—why, there's nothing
Funnier in all the world. I saw it once
In the States, a half-breed tarred and feathered, running
For life, out of his mind with terror, yet
Absurd as well as pitiable. But pity
There can't be here, unless some pity me.
. . . It should be she. Tom, Tom, don't let me think
Again of her, for God's sake ; yet how not
Think and think till thought is stretched to cracking ?

There was a time, no matter how long ago,
When she—Did you see ? Some one was moving there :
I heard a movement.
Let us get this done.
—Come you, you can't stay here all night ; all night
You shall sing if you will against her window,
And she shall hear and lean out and call, " Come ! "
But you can't come, for you'll be chained up there.
How will she look, speak, cry, look again, swoon
To see you helpless there.
No, she must laugh and, half-ashamed, laugh again ;
She'll laugh at you and say, " How funny he looks ! "
But me she laughed at first and longest, as
One laughs at the deceived, despising them
Because deceiving them. Yes, to her I
Was despicable, absurd as this grotesque
I've painted and marred so. So she marred me
While far-off I was sleeping confident,
Stripped me and painted me with gross deceit
And laughed from low to high of her clear voice,
Saying, " The fool, to think that I should sleep
While he's asleep, or good as sleeping, distant."
Then this thin lecher laughed too, as he answered,
" But we're awake and here, not far-off drowsed."
And I know how she looked and poured her sight
Into his eyes, between his lips her breath
Whispering—lower than I'm whispering now—
Such thoughts, such things ; then into her thirsty heart
Drawing the muddy trickle of this lust.

There was an hour,
I said, when that hid footstep startled us
A moment since, when she and I no more
Were she and I, but interfusing mind

And spirit ; when I drank of her my joy
And showered over her my cloud of strength.
She was the earth, waving her woods for me,
And I the heaven filling her drought with rain ;
Then I the earth athirst at the day's end ; she
The cloud floating above and pouring down.
Her kindness, man, that turned my dust to green !
And kindness captures me and makes me a child,
Blind and patient till new kindness come.
None before her had lived for me. I met her
Timidly, wanting ease and slow to speak
And only quick to look and listen. She too
Was shy, and flushed at her own nervous tongue,
And at mine tangled with confusions. So
First meeting passed, and other meetings then—
All the rest that you know. Time was so short,
I thought she loved me : surely it was love
That flushed her and so drew me after her ;
Time was so short, but surely it was love !
Had she not loved me once and briefly then
I had not hated as I hate her now.
O, now and then are terrible words. She loved,
She loves not, and has stripped me bare. For time
And space taught her forgetfulness and near
Was more than far, and now sharper than then.
She could not wait : she clutched at anything ;
Her fingers closed upon this rotten bough.

Tom, I've done. These are but my thoughtless thoughts,
Worded but for myself—heedless or careless
That you were here. Now I'm empty, remorse
May come for things done, said and misconceived.
But it's myself, I tell you, I've chained there,
Myself as she has made me, mocked and loathed. . . .

Let remorse come, to salt the wounds of hate
And sooner cure them, or increase the pang
Past heart's endurance.

Now let us step back.
Are the chains firm ?—Beneath her window bound
She'll see you when she wakes and draws the blind.
But there will be a crowd first and such laughter,
Gibing and shouting, that she'll wake soon, wondering,
And not see you for the throng of heads above you ;
And come down, pitying vaguely, curious
To see what makes such laughter ; and press through
Until her eyes stare at your stare.

—Now, Tom !

II

I spoke not. Now I'm thankful I spoke not.
I did not think it possible to keep
Against all that fury silence. If I'd said
A single word, or cursed myself or him,
God knows what might have followed ; but the worst
Is past now, though what's yet to come may seem
The worst, and to endure day's ignominy
Be harder than the anger of one wronged.
To have answered storm with storm, by new injury
To enlarge or obscure old injury—No !

No more
Creating ill from ill, I said not a word.
Count that to me for kindness, Grace, and let
Your last unpunished sleep be therefore sweet.
For dawn will bring to you, to me, the unclean
Gaze and fools' laughter of the street, and scarce
For you than me less stain of infamy.
The righteous chorus will sweep baying at you,

At me, as well they might, and ease your fear
Of future hell who sound hell's deep sea now.
Will you be knit to me, as I to you,
More closely by this savage justice than
By any mercy of oblivion ?

There's but a few short hours until day breaks,
When you will start from sleep and no more sleep
As now. Not then of love
Shall we speak, whispering, but love chilled to mere
Loyalty of clipped wings and sullen pulse.
And whether I be curse to you or you
Be curse to me, or each be dull to each,
The licence that so shocks the world must be
Contracted to a prison in our world.
. . . Come, Grace, and let me think that you are here,
Disregarding the black sport made of me :
Sit here, not in my sight but in my mind
As you must now for ever be. Stay so,
That the common sun and rain
May ripen autumn fruit hidden beneath
Leaves of our lives that shake in the world's wind.

O, but I dream. Here by the road I'm bound,
Exposed to mockery and shame when dawn
Unshutters the amusèd world ; and you
Opposite, sleeping yet, will awake amid
Loathing and the reproach of all the honest
Who had no cause to fear what made you fall—
Not youth, nor loneliness, nor doubt nor need
Of kindness. . . . How should they not revile ?
Wrongs done, I know, will never be undone,
And to return were but to wander farther
In salter deserts, overwhirled by lifted sands.

Let me not talk of wrongs but of endurance
Of the wrong done by our once heedless hearts.
Can we endure the wrong we do ? The sting
Of wrong is in that harsh endurance.

Grace,
Were you here now I'd whisper, Love me yet,
As I love you ; for unless love endure
This ignominy were tenfold ignominy,
Fruitless to bear, impossible to escape.
See yourself here with me, Grace. See them come,
Neighbours and strangers with quick, taunting tongues,
Drenching us with scorn ; and know our wild selves wrong
Since we have broken their security.
And made their sleep uneasy. . . .
Grace, let my whisper wake you ! Get you strength,
Of pride if may be, but get strength of love
To bear this nearing storm, nor let it break
Into your spirit and urge you to despair,
And the inconstancy of despair.

Yet I could plead for you, if plea might serve.
Almost unfriended, and no sooner loved
Than left ; surprised by that first love
And thinking that surprise was love returned. . . .
Ignorant and dear heart was yours then, Grace,
That knew not your own gratitude for love
From love itself ; until, first parting over,
You found yourself cold and your heart, forsaken,
Knocked anew to no answer. Ignorance first
Was all your sin, till knowledge brought another.
Sleep yet, Grace. I will let my brain once more
While untormented bring the lost hour back.
Lonely you were and listless as you walked
Between the haycocks in July's pale heat,
And long-parched as the fields for rain withheld.

Then first it was I saw you, once, twice, thrice,
And not till yet again made means to speak.
Scarce need to speak was there. Our voices met,
And the echoes intertwining, swelling, sank
Into our cavern'd hearts, there multiplying
Till all sound save of those blent syllables
Fell unheard. Why, it had seemed murder then
To have parted with that new birth in our mind!
That murder had we done, think you our grief
Would have been less than this incumbent shame?
No choice was ours. We spoke, and spoke not aught
Of hindrance to our speaking, but full-born
In a moment caught love burning to our bosom
And in our breath his gathered echoes heard. . . .
Between the haycocks walked we, in the hedge
Sat under heavy yews where the path hides
Between the yews. That easy hour was sweet
As the dew heavy on the thicket thorn.
There was a thicket unseen in which our spirits,
Hesitating, flew and nested, while the dews
Of first love shook upon us, and our thoughts
Than any words were clearer; in that thicket
Immaterial, your heart at last awake
Sang, and mine sang, and the dense world dimmed away,
And even our words' echoes died away.
—O memory narcotic!
. . . Sleep awhile
Yet, until a clamour calls you up,
Maybe from such a dream as my strong thought
New builds in waking out of things gone past.
And Grace, what sweet and native was in us
And in the sudden light that flooded down,
Even that, our best, will be exposed and staled,
Spotted, and the idea of love defamed;

Yes, best with worst will be confused and cast
Like dog's meat in a yelping market-place.
Nothing will stable be save we endure
With eyes unwavering on that visioned light;
Nor to give hate for hate will be permitted
To the changed loyalty of remorseful hearts.
O, while remorse obscures our light with smoke
And blunts the edge of every sense but pain,
Still, still to hold it with our inward orb
Is task for honour untried.

—Already? Or a drunkard is it, tumbling
Homeward and savage now that pleasure's spent?
Stay so, O cloud, across the careless Moon,
Let her not finger me until he's past.
He halts and looks—it's he that's afraid. Begone!
—If I were made for laughing I could laugh
To see him fly as though a familiar devil
Gibbered at him. So one drunkenness drives out
Another. I can hear his footsteps yet.
But others coming anon will pause and peer,
Ask and surmise.
If *he* were to come back
Now and renew his anger here. . . . No, no!
I had forgotten that, and will forget
What was said lest suppression make me mad.
Now I crouch here as between swoon and swoon,
Half sensitive, half steel; so I remember
I lay once in the ward between the oblivion
Of anæsthetic sleep and after-sleep.
Now do I know how lean, caged beasts must feel.—
Can I forbear to answer? The pale light
Makes the crude jest too palpable, and they've found
Some writing that I suppose gives clue to all.

I might have guessed that would not be forgotten !
It falls but lightly upon me now who feel
Heaviness within. . . . Yes, louder if you will,
Name and offence : never a human tongue
Spoke truthfuller, if it were all the truth.
How quickly come a score if but one shouts !
Is laughter always vicious ? Are we but beasts
To rejoice in the ill from which our fears alone,
Or native coldness, save us ? So they stare
In luxury of imagination. It is the crowd
That destroys the man in men, the mother in women,
And makes them cry, or shamefaced whisper, " Kill ! "
So do we run together, being afraid
To stand alone, live, sin and suffer alone,
And if one move apart and stumble, " Look,
After him, heaven and hell—swift to the death ! "

O, you I've injured, are you not well paid ?
Take care, lest you exhaust your injury
That else could warm you to the end of life
So that, in the extreme of niggard age,
You still might set your faint heart glowing with—
" That's what I did then, I my own Avenger ! "
Telling yourself and others over and over
This.
But take care. Anger's a greedy thing.
Think, would you be my debtor for contempt ?
You hear not, and I toss these thoughts to you
Only because such ribald sounds at me
Are tossed by these your leaguers in revenge.
Laughter and words are crueller than coarse hands,
And these are they that laugh
Seeing two monkeys in a music-hall
Dressed in the tortured image of old men.

Is there so little to laugh at in the world
But pain ? 'Tis to give justice cap and bells
And mock his old unhappy wisdom.
No !
I'll not answer : only pray again that while
Her window's yet untouched I may be freed . . .
What devil has broken her window ? Where is she now ?
The falling glass must have aroused her—Well,
It's an old English sport, flinging dry clods
At a bound man. Spare but her ears and eyes
And mine shall pay.
This is the end. The Law
At last, majestically slow. They are quiet.
Law is amused, Law is disdainful—so !
You must get these chains off ; I am stiff as stone.
Yes, that's my coat. Where you will, so it be
No longer here.
How human voices sound
Unhuman. . . .
I am stiff and cold. Now to your window, Grace.

III

In this quiet space the heaving trees are soft
As my hair when I brush it. Quietly the Moon
Orders the shadows. They march to her nod
With scarce a shiver in their listening files.
They are like thoughts obeying another mind,
Or voices uttering words that love has taught.
It is a spell laid on the trees and night,
And these my wavering thoughts move to the spell
You have laid on me, now moving near or far
Around, O you, my love

Yes, this warm dark
Breathes another spell, harmonizing with yours,
Soft with your sharp, sweet with your power, your freshness
With the enfolding languor of the trees.
Such lifting nights show me what Norman means
When he says I am older than my years,
For in me there's such movement and such quiet
Awhile, and quiet and movement everywhere,
That I am more than girl and walk amid
The bushy shades as a mother with her children,
Knowing their thoughts unspoken. Yet my own,
My agitated thoughts, I seldom know.
They fret me, and I have no trick to soothe,
And all uneasy murmur " Hush ! " unheard.
Yes, even now this quiet stirs with touch
Of pain, issuing from never-sleeping thought
In notes too sharp . . . Norman, let your thought fall
Soothingly upon these, and bid them hush.

Easy and happy they who need not think,
Nor ask " Where lies the dim road I have left ? "
Their feet follow the road by insect steps
Unpausing, and the company is theirs
Of myriads blessedly like themselves,
Friendly in darkness, thoughtless in the bright day.
Easy and happy so : less easy I,
Since from the road I am parted by these thorns
And brambles and gnat-breeding stagnant pools,
Ancient and never-drying. . . . Happier far
To move unquestioning, content amid
The myriad content, unquestioning.
O, were I man, with a man's eyes and mind,
I had not left the road's edge with regret.
But I am woman still, scarce woman even,

And like a clinging dress old habits catch
In bramble and thorn boughs, and I stand shaking,
Ambiguously seen.
But the road's a prison
If thought but strays. And hard now to repierce
The dense-grown intertwixture and stand unwounded
And unespied upon the common way.
Now can I sigh, and nothing do but sigh,
" Had Norman come first, ere was need to wish ! "
Yet you have come, though late, and I have passed
Half-purposed and half-heedless from the road,
Regretting not the road, nor you, but only
The hurt I gave.
The hurt I gave I give
Still, in each breath drawn in disloyalty
To that precipitate vow. Might instinct serve
For reason, then forgiveness would speak.
But instinct is dishonoured, and the plea
Would blacken guilt ; instinct and youth are false.
No plea is mine but unashamèd shame,
Since that prelusive and mistaken warmth
Faded, and I slept coldly and awoke
To forgetfulness and love.
How often these
Pangs of excuseless injuries return,
As now, in the middle of quiet hours
And fresh recovered mind ! My love, if you
This very night have cast your mind upon me,
Know that mine's floating lonely 'neath your cloud.
So ease and quiet flow back through me while
The Moon's bright rod renews her silver spell.

What is it breaks the quiet air ? What voice
Muted, yet harsh ? All's still—now strikes eleven ;

The uneven notes are swollen with long echoes
Confused, and the last stroke is like a bird
Falling, and falling faster as it falls
Into silence. How relieved is the air,
Discharged of the gross burden and heaped echoes!
All's still again—No, that voice sounds again
And harsher, as though secrecy forgot.
Here may I see unseen. There are two men,
And one between them crouched. Who are these men?
None moves, and but one talks. His voice is thick,
Else I might think . . . else I might think
—It is his,
It is his: I know it, and now all, all's known,
All's ended. Night, cover me lest I cry!
Let my knees fail that I may run not there,
Let me but listen and be dumb, except
My heart cry when it breaks. There all my life
Is broken. . . . Nearer, from tree to tree, nearer—so!
Now I may listen, if I endure to listen.
Answer him, Norman: no, answer him not.
—My husband, had there been a way to love
And time, and patience in your hasty heart,
This had not been, and I had never cried
Thus to your enemy now, "Answer him not!"
Run, Norman, or strike now. No, no, no,
Tempt them not so to murder. Stay and shut
Your ears, your eyes, your mind, your memory,
And fold up everything but love.—My husband,
Men win not back in this way what is lost.
Yourself you rob of your good cause, if so
You glut your hunger with this brute revenge.
What are they doing, Norman? They move not,
Yet now your shoulders, now your limbs are white,
Leaf-spotted by the trees. I can hear nothing,

He speaks so hoarsely : only an angry drone,
And still no answer . . .
O, foul, foul, foul !
Never in retrospection even shall I
Name you again, " My husband ! " since you've given
Your mind to vileness. Horrible, horrible,
He calls the Moon to shine on Norman now,
Defiled and black—as he would blacken the Moon
Herself, and poison all things living with hate.
And are you, Norman, are you even yet still ?
Is it contempt that shuts your lips, or is it
Sad resolution to bear the unbearable ?
I heard my name
Harsh on that bitter tongue, and urging Tom
To fetch me. But you have your wish, I am here,
Though you shall never know save to unwish.
Pity is gone. What's due to you you have snatched
With a wolf's muzzle, snarling angrily.

What, shall I laugh ?
You say I'll laugh to see from my dark window
Norman ? The rest I cannot hear. . . . O, fool,
Whom should I laugh at, if mood for laughter were ?
Even at you I cannot laugh, for madness
Is pitiful. . . . Yes, pity returns to drop
Scalding upon the nakedness of your hate.
When this intoxication's done you'll burn
Again, to think how pity babbles your name,
Whimpering foolishly after you whithersoever
Remorse for this shall thrust you. 'Tis to yourself
That your revenge will cling, burning from out
To inward. You could not spare yourself
Since your deep injury (I know how deep)
Was not too deep for burial in revenge.

Ah, now they move, and I,
The unseen bond that binds their hate together,
Move after with my love that springs and spreads,
Wasting uselessly away. They halt,
Move again, rest. Yes there, Norman, there
Stay until dawn, but I will sing to you
Unheard, to ease your grief, if ease may be,
And thoughts shall fly between ; and when at last
You are left alone, I will creep down whispering
" Norman ! " if strength be left to creep,
That now is none, nor voice. After this night
And this sharp-edgèd dawn, after this shame,
Is there not sweetness in unconsciousness,
When the ease of pain retreating is more sweet
Than all that lacks pain in its birth ? So, then,
This one night, this one burning, gnawing night
Over, what end soever it shall bear,
Invisible yet, needs must it usher day,
Soberly rising.

At last indoors, unseen—coward or wise,
Unseen ; and Chance alone to plead with now
For kindness. O, return to me, body's strength ;
I would not now of all time be so weak.
If I could bid my brain to spare the body
And my thoughts turn to blood within these veins !
Turn back, Time, but a year, a month, a night ;
Undo this that is done, disembody the dream
Misfeatured standing here.
. . . Between the blind and casement, if I may reach—
So, I may see you, Norman. I am here,
Norman ! Now, patience and a little strength.
But there's a voice, and other voices, louder
Increasing. It is all but over. Hold,

Hold still your strength. I need yours. They look here
Savagely, laughing. They are flinging at the window.
Ah,
Stay, stay, enough, enough. But I will not cry.
O unkind justice, neighbour to revenge,
Injured, you injure again. I hurt, I am hurt.
Enough. . . . Now, Norman, only you and I
And the embittered world.

KINDNESS UNKIND

PRONE in the dark I lay, unsensed, forgot,
While over me Time's minutes fell like rain.
Then you, by whom I died, some kindness cast
Upon my memory, and I bled again.

CATERPILLARS

Of caterpillars Fabre tells how day after day
Around the rim of a vast earth pot they crawled,
Tricked thither as they filed shuffling out one morn
Head to tail when the common hunger called.

Head to tail in a heaving ring day after day,
Night after slow night the starving mommets crept,
Each following each, head to tail day after day
An unbroken ring of hunger—then it was snapt.

I thought of you, long-heaving, horned green caterpillars,
As I lay awake. My thoughts crawled each after each,
Crawling at night each after each on the same nerve,
An unbroken ring of thoughts too sore for speech.

Over and over and over and over again
The same hungry thoughts and the hopeless same regrets,
Over and over the same truths, again and again
In a heaving ring returning the same regrets.

Love will not die. "I know," I said, "Love dies.
Because it lives like any living thing,
Buds, leafs, flowers, fruits, creating love again,
It dies, it dies. The lovely, delicate flower
Stiffens in the winter air and dies. And hark,
How many birds that sing in this clear April
Winter will stiffen and their music still!
—I know it will die, although I shall not kill it.
Love in this frozen wind of care, or strangled
By weeds that suck the strength of every stem,
Love of itself will die. And I shall say,
'Perhaps it is better so—perhaps—perhaps.'"
For only epitaph this evil lie.

"No, no, no, no!" you said. "It shall not die.
Parted, the love that joined us shall not die.
Make not more bitter parting now for me.
Death is a horrible thing if Love must die,
And life is equal horror." So we parted,
Protesting each with hearts not in our words
But in our eyes, and silenced with our kiss.

I know now I was wrong: Love does not die,
Though you smile easefully now, "Ah, he was right—
Love dies, is dead."
But I know I was wrong.
No April flower perishing in November,
No frozen bird fallen from a rimy bough,
But a deep-rooted hill that bears the seasons
Like shadows on his breast, or a southern mount
Burning with fire always, a glory and ruin—
Love does not die. I would that Love might die.

Though it speak the tongue of hate, though it fling barbs
Of anger—who so surely as Love could fling,
And how shall Love not hate that cannot love ?
I cannot forget how brain to brain, body to body
Clung, and well satisfied in quietness slept.
Now brain and body are burning still, I would
That Love might die, or turn to simple hate. . . .
Ah, happy you, who sit in such contentment,
Smiling, " He was right after all. Love dies."

The Rabelaisian Elm that in the hedge
Two hundred yards away, the ribald, lifted
Its leafless trunk with the protuberant belly ;
That Elm, the ugliest in the rich Elm land,
Was friendly when we laughed to see it naked.
" Lovely are Elms," you said, because I loved them.
And as we talked of all the trees of England,
" I will plant two Elms," you cried, " there at the fence,
One mine, one yours. They shall grow up together,
As we grow old they will grow tall, and springs
That find us slowlier waking shall wake them
With a sudden wave of green over red buds ;
And rooks will come, their cries and shadows falling
Slowly down, and renewing joy in us
Remembering many, many years ago
(And that's to-day) we planted two small Elms
At the garden's edge. Yes, you will come one evening
And we will lean as now against the door
Watching the sun setting between the two Elms,
And then the stars above them and upon
The branches, glittering bright." . . .

This is the time and weather for elm-planting.
But when the carrier brings them will you say,
" I don't know where to put them," and leave them lying
In the cold rain and frost till the roots are dead
Because you will not plant one now for me ?
Or will you say, but not to me, " Look here !
Let's plant these two Elms by the fence, that when
We're old, they shall grow taller and taller till
Their heads are flushed, though purple shadows lie
About their feet : one shall be yours, one mine ? "

Maybe he'll answer, " I don't care for Elms."
And you then, " Nor do I. Let them alone ! "
Then on the garden heap they'll perish, while
The Rabelaisian Elm will laugh for me,
And breathe out bitterness all the winter night.

THAT DAY SO KIND

—That day so kind,
When May was kind and you were kind, we walked
On the yew-stationed road singing old songs
We could not quite remember or forget.
Middle-aged lovers, we sat on the stile
Where the brown colt came rubbing, and you twisted
Your breast-ribbon in a love knot of his hair
And sent him flourishing it across the mead.
The day so kind—the first hot day that year,
The sun burned in the heavens and through the earth
In violet and bluebell everywhere :—
The blind might tread the road by the sweet smell
And warm their eyeless sockets by the flowers' fire,
As we warmed our eyes saying, " How kind the day ! "
Even kinder you, with kindness humbling me,
As kindness can.
There was no night that day
Long ago, and you were never again so kind,
Nor can be now that kindness from you were
Unbearable. But know, my dear, if I
Pay kindness now with these reproachful memories
Or harsher words, 'tis that love unreprieved
Mutters a little before it stiffen and hang
Above the road as you walk happy by
And singing songs that I had never heard.

THE WILD BEAST

I COME upon you in my mind continually.
Is it that lovely country where you lived
That brings you, or do you that country bear
Reflected in your eyes when they look at me
Out of other eyes? I did not think that love
Could be so painful. Will it never end?
  But a year since I said I knew myself,
But did not know, as now, that I cannot change.
There is so much to live on in my mind,
I cannot but remember and remember
So much, that love can never starve and die.
O, if you could as lightly as you shed
Like leaves from vigorous boughs your love for me,
If you could but have killed my love for you
Sorrow had been the less. But there's so much
Of you within me, and the land we loved
Together when we loved each other yet,
That in my mind continually I find you;
And when I hate, or use the words of hate,
It is with such blind agony as maddens
The hunted wild beast that consumes her young.

HEAL

You sit among your Heal—the leadless glaze,
Flowered curtains, brass, uncarpeted brown floors—
A bright-haired woman in your bright-hued silk.
The wood on the stone hearth bubbles and hisses and
bursts
Into a tangled flame. The old house is
Centuries old, yet you are not afraid
Though you fear age as you fear loneliness.
You sit there, O my dear, staring into the fire,
Thinking, " How happy I am ! He's almost here."
. . . So stay, O love, lapped in your happiness
As in your winter furs of wild dead beasts.
Those beasts are dead and you smile from their skins.
A love is dead, and from its dead warmth you
Smile, as you hear the latch, " I am so happy ! "
You are all one happiness now, for your mind follows
Your body's energy. So stay, O love,
Bright-haired, bright-hued, repeating all that's said,
Believing it's your own when you repeat it,
Among your plates and curtains, brass and wood,
And fire that burns above the silver ash.

THIS ONE BREATH

My Love, I send this one breath after you.
All over your prone body it shall creep
Where my quick-breathing hand has crept and slumbered,
And it shall lift in your uncurling strong
Hair ; on the lashes of your cherry eyes
Falling, and closing them ; then with your breath
Indrawn shall all your body and your spirit
Penetrate and awaken and amaze—
" What is this breath that moving over me
And into me confuses flesh with spirit,
And makes me all a hungry fear and joy ?
This breath that makes a mother of me again,
Bearing the spiritual fruit of his quick thought ?
I am afraid."
So shall I know once more
Delight and sorrow of unwanted love.

MIGHT I FORGET

Might I forget, who never have forgotten!
What is it Love feeds on, that will not die
Though the beseech'd wings never about his head
Agitate the air, nor ever comes again
Sight of belovèd eyes, sound of her voice,
Touch of her burning hand, whose look, voice, hand
Once music brought to midnight and such hues,
Such visions, as the power of drugs has never
Revived in rich, vain dreams? Yet Love lives on,
A bird with beak plunged in his reddened breast . . .
Might I forget! but in all waking hours
By mortal cares unvexed her shape I seek
Whose shape my hand and eyes travelling upon
Knew satisfaction. Nor those orbs I see
That held mine in unsteady motion, nor
Her voice I hear; and yet no street but hints
Her coming and going, and no beechen hill
But cheats me with her whispered, missing touch,
So light, so warm, so quick, so brief, so vain.
But most the sudden thought by which are shattered
The gates of being, when she runs swiftly through
Highways and lanes with lifted torch and cries
That startle sleep and snap the bonds of the dead,
And they rush out, memories and old desires,
"Where is she?" pleading, and none answering,
"Here!"—
And other thoughts when, sick of changeless pain,
Love burns like hate and with the skill of hate
Fashions those darts for her that wound him sorest.
So she, when nothing's visible, nothing heard,
Then subtly comes and darkness aches with pain. . . .

Might I forget, who never have forgotten—
Ah, treacherous mind, one day I did forget,
One whole day passed unanguished, one short day,
One only day unhaunted by the cry
Unuttered, " She is here ! "
It was a day
When sparkling frost sowed light over the earth
From hill to hill, and in the valley I,
Snared in the net of light, contented stirred,
Then lay entranced. Frost on the hawthorn boughs,
Frost on the few stained bramble leaves, and frost
Flashing from the cropped grass and long tangled grass,
Frost in the air defying awhile the sun
Who sprang up as a young man from long sleep
And with bright hair-like beams swept all the earth.
Looking upon that cold, renewed white world,
Beside the hushed stream, I forgot those ills—
Injustice and despair and fruitless love—
That torture men moving from life to death,
And forgot ev'n that dear and familiar
Surge of the senses whose tossed wave unfelt
Broke now against a dream-exalted cliff
Cold in clear dawn and crowned with virgin moon.
These I forgot, and her too I forgot,
And stole such happiness as poets dream
Who wake to see imagination fade,
And their rich loaded hopes like gutted wrecks.
So I woke from a dream's treachery and remembered
All that I had forgotten, seeking again
Her eyes, voice, touch among deceiving things,
And hurt anew by those old mortal ills.

Now do I know
How newly-dead men go
As ragged ghosts among familiar ways,
Seeking to live again remembered days.

I see one stand,
Vale and Mount on either hand,
And saying, " Here I walked and walked with her ;
Here was wheat, and hops here, and charlock there.

" Here was elder,
First-tinted berries of guelder.
Here, long before, wild apple flushed full pink.
Here broke that fire of violets, I think—

" Or was it—yes,
It was there they burned to death.
How all things burned that spring, and burned away,
As spring burned into summer, and then lay

" Glowing and prone,
With summer lovelier grown !
My heels with hers made rhyme upon the flint,
In music voice and silences were blent.

" And now, never,
Never, never, never, never,
Never again ! " And turning away he aches,
And with old mortal sorrow his heart breaks ;

Wishing he were
But one sad hour with her
On that salt road, with hill and vale and cloud,
Oast-houses, orchards, violets, skylarks loud.

O, now I know
How one new-dead must go,
How in his haunted shadow-brain for ever
Sounds the forsaken, " Never, never, never ! "

If ease should come
To you in any wild distress;
If o'er the constant breast of happiness
Strange energy should sweep
And whelm you in new waters swift and deep;

If in the night
Before your restless spirit slumber,
Strained by the soiled bands that blind and cumber,
One wind-borne flame should hiss
Through the dense dark, and burn them with its kiss;

If causeless grief
(For the Snake into Eden crept,
And his sad sorceries whispered while Eve slept)
Moan like a low East wind
Within the unshuttered chambers of your mind;

And sudden then
Such sweetness comes, and dew
Flashes in seven-hued light the morning through,
And lovelier, kinder airs
Are heard than any the cold East wind bears;

Or if, perchance,
In bitterness you cry, "O brain,
O heart, all useless, animated in vain!"
And then an echo sings,
And heart and brain anew to wisdom stings:—

Know then 'tis I
That breathe the sudden energy;
Flame, sweet airs, hues and echoes are from me;
And I far off have bled
That with my life your fading life be fed.

THE WALL

Against the cold wall climbs the tree,
Shivering in colder rain,
Tapping in vain
At the shut casement : heaving, creaking
When the wind stirs
And wildly blurs
The lighted pane.

Can there such hurt be, and none speaking ?
These branches tapping upon
The earless stone,
This painful limb in night gusts creaking—
What is it they cry
To no reply
But the wind's moan ?

Shakes at your wall this human tree.
Still is your window fast,
While Time drones past.
Hear you not yet my branches creaking ?
They lift and fall
Against the cold wall :
Still is the window fast.

Night's self is in my branches speaking,
And yet is no reply.
Night's storm flows by :
Your shadow, where my boughs thrust creaking,
Draws swift and stark . . .
Now the lit pane is dark,
Night thunders by.

HAD it pleased Heaven ! I said,
Accusing Heaven and the hostility of stars ;
Or had I wiser been or kinder been,
I should not this forsaken dawn have seen
Murmuring, " A year ago, a year ago ! "
And now how vain such talk is well I know.

This strange dark love, I said,
Is for eternity, or else were sin.
Less than eternity would make it crime,
Locked in the common jail of use and time.
. . . But you were frightened of eternity
And ran back into time, forgetting me.

But I cannot escape
Back into time. I cannot cease to love.
And like a wind that moans with hungry sound
Lifting the tawny sands, and still pads round
All day, all night ; my endless thought breathes on
The desert that was flowers ere you were gone.

THE WINTER WATER

THE winter water over the meadow flows
From broken fence to leafless hedge.
Sea-fennel and river-sedge
Here end. Only a starling goes
Following the wind that paths the unpathed flat
Of gleamless water with its shifting edge.
Yet once were meadow blossoms and bramble bowers,
And low mounds starred with flowers
—Not for memorial, but fresh love that sows
Seeds of delight in spring's first hours
Then rests 'neath thorn or rose.
  But now all's hidden here but branches stark
Holding in pale light their promise dark.
Yet I remember cool grass, glowing gold,
The leaf-like lark
Blown up on the wind
And her song streaming far behind.
Shrinks then at once the water into the dyke,
The sunny fingers as of old
Flutter, and strike
From the moist green new gold.
  And here, beneath
The naked and unshadowed water stretched like death
Over this that was you,
Where now the desolating wild winds sweep
Out of eternal sorrow's deep,
Here yet is love asleep
In meadows starred again with gold and white;
Falls here again the lark's song from his aery height.
And if my thought turns from the common road of day
    and night
When the wind's whining in the senseless wire,

And stares a moment on that watery hue,
Again the grasses shake, the mead is afire ;
Again I cry, " Here then we loved, and here
Long, long before our midsummer drew near,
Love was consumed in death."

YOU BELIEVED TOO SOON

If I had not been cold nor you been false!
It was my coldness made you faithless: else
You had clung to me yet for warmth; but needing fire
You ran bewildered with your own desire
For warmth and touch, afraid of solitude,
Not knowing my coldness was a helpless mood
Blown from the Arctic of the spirit, gone
After brief while, and I then no more stone.
How in that chillness did I ache for you
Though ice was on my lips! how in me grew
Under that green-hung glittering glass a heat
Melting the ice, burning from brain to feet!
O, you believed too soon the words I told,
Too lightly thought I moved alone and cold
Through deathly seas: you disbelieved me not,
No more than I knew did you know my thought.
When I said, "I am too cold to love you more!"
You thought it was I that spoke, and not the frore
Lips of an evil spirit in my guise
Stealing my voice, falsifying my eyes.

Have you before been faithless, or I cold?
Ere to this last mortality we were sold,
Did we in other bodies love and fail?
In other shapes did our dear spirits quail,
Each misconceiving, each misapprehended?
And in this present is our torment ended?
Or shall I yet in other births again
Mistake for death the mere excess of pain?
And, in your children, you too soon believe
And seek another fire its warmth to give?
Again, again, the endless same mistake?

Such thoughts, my love, are torture when I wake.
For if these things be true, then was love slain
Even in its birth, and will be slain again.
We by ŏnce loving have new love begotten,
To live when nineteen-twenty is forgotten ;
And my cold mood again out of the north
Will creep, and you again run bewildered forth,
And I once again burn through the glacial air,
And you yet again be lost, and yet still dear.
If these wild things be true, then is love slain
In its every birth, again, again, again.

THE KEYS

I GAVE you all the keys
That you might look
In each room, cellar, nook,
Even in the high unguessed-at loft,
Roofless to the skies.

And all the history
Of each I taught ;
Things in the secrecy of thought
Close-locked ; the jangling past, wild future,
Folly, faith, heresy :—

The mind's, the spirit's ways,
That you might go
Everywhere, and thoroughly know
Everything, and nought dissembled or hid
From your eager eyes.

But O, pride, pride !
How am I shamed,
By my soul utterly blamed.
After you'd stared from cellar to loft
You turned aside :

You are mine no more,
Yet hold the keys.
I am naked to your eyes . . .
Never my pride a worser sting
Or shame more burning bore.

DISAPPEARANCE

The young tree rises from the fallen seed
And between neighbour stems her crown uplifts
Into the arching blue
That's poised on the spread acres of earth's lofty weed.
She rises amid the branchless trees, she too
Branchless, and scarce a shadow wakes and drifts
To earth 'neath the close-tented leaves;
Her song is but their song when the wind heaves
Solemnly or runs shrilling their tall regiment through.
And when to their smooth height her stem is grown
And the earth exhausted out of which she drew,
With them is she cut down.

So did he mark, leading his body 'mid
The sunless wood where shadow followed not
And cool the air was when the meadow sun grew hot.
" So am I but a limbless tree-vexed tree
With no broad air and light flowing in me,
No song to hold, no lingering wind to magnify,
But other selves in narrow neighbourhood
That each like other grew and aught else feared or hid;
Nor their dividual destiny understood
Nor cared for understanding. Nor am I
Happier caring, but stand mute and vexed
By long reiterate ' near ' and ' next '."

In the serener air that follows youth
When beauty seems not enemy to truth
And honour and delight sing for a while
The same half-thoughtless song and warm with the same
smile,
In that serener air he had but strayed
A brief and blissful space.

A haunting care crept from within and scarred his face ;
In his own heart he heard another's cry ;
His voice died in the deep undertone that, swelling, weighed
Gradual upon his senses and so stayed,
As rain that all night falling from the sky
Shakes in broad shallows in the morning's eye.

Needs must his sentient years, or soon or late
Brushing insentient and forgetful years,
Tingle with apprehensions dark and unexpressed ;
Like those deep waters hidden beneath the earth ,
That seldom in cool brightness issue forth.
Foresense was his of the crude wounds of Fate
And salt of common tears
And age's alternating blind rest and unrest,
And present sense of quick
Virtue's discretions, evil's timidities,
And trivial cares like flies
Buzzing around a body prone and sick.

Like flies. . . . And men like flies in multitude
Hummed round his thought, till passing from the wood
He reached the clearing and disburdened stood,
Looking down at the trees.
There crouched the day, caught in the arms of night,
But here the moving air was light
And the wind tossed at ease
Up and down between the sky and grass, and in his mood
Lifted and fell.
Then where the mound was sunk to a grassy dell
He lay, between the earth's soft knees,
Faint heaving in the green's long ebb and swell.

On such a day, long since, he had passed from road
And hamlet and the fresh-leaved Oxford lanes

And meads where young May stains
With brighter gold the green; the clear hedge-waters flowed
Full yet with April rains.
And climbing then the steeper fields and then
Thridding the spinney where thin birch began
Music of their least shivering to make,
He reached a space where light unshadowy glowed
From sun and gilded grass, and showed
A sleeping snake,
Then others sleeping too or basking half awake.

Pure happiness it was to see them there
In that warm pool of May morn air,
Green-glittering and changing in the sun,
As they the issue were
Of earth and light, and born
Here on this May morn.
Then as he looked, first one
And then another and another stirred
And without movement disappeared;
But one, still covetous of the ambient heat,
Remained and nothing felt or feared,
Green-glittering and changing almost at his feet.

And so might he too live, uncareful, free,
Pursuing but a thought upon the wind
While seasons streamed their changes through his mind;
So on earth's shoulder in security
Of solitude and quiet stayed, once more
Recovered might the lost communion be
That was for man's delight and need designed.
And then would come what in time long before
Had seemed not distant, when his eye could see

Spiritual fulfilment as a gleaming shore
With cliffs embayed and clouds that dip and flee
And waves that sprinkle light for vision not all blind.

Most like that lovely and long-fabled land,
Half dreamed, half seen with eyes
Where the sea lies
A sleeping snake between wide amber sand.
With idle hand
Amid the idle wave he pulled, then rested
His head upon the water and watched all
The shimmering coast, the ridged promontory,
The faint white town hill-nested,
And higher the serene-air'd mountain wall;
And then turned musingly
Southward again with slow stroke and broad-breasted,

And knew that when he raised again his head
Upon the mean magnificence he would stare
Of that great city splintering the sky
With shaft and tower, and as a swoln toad spread,
Staining the shore, yet fair.
Still did the weed of time's long memories lie
Neglected where
Conqueror and often-conquered rose and fell . . .
Were it not better—still to float on the soft swell
Towards the Mediterranean, or to sleep
Once and for ever lonely in this narrow deep,
Than breathe again that million-burdened air?

But most a lonely isle, lonely as death
Itself, beyond the farthest Grecian foam,
He dreamed of where, unvexed by the staled breath
And sick herd-movement of humanity,
In silence might he find a spiritual home,

Or but with natural voice of beast and wind and sea
Enlarging and diminishing fitfully.
So too might fitful come
Back the dispers'd and bruisèd energies,
As wings sprinkle the skies
Returning to old nesting haunts; and so
A new life in his starving nerves would flow.

"Come back!" inly he cried, remembering now
Such longings in old days.
But if those wings had flown back they had gone
Unrecognizing and unpausing on
Where day moved quiet and night breathed calm and slow
Beneath the moon's unagitated gaze.
—To escape from the heaped enceinte of men's ways
That were not his yet rose
Near, to enclose
Touch, breath, hearing, sight:—
How leap the encircling height
And plunge in that renewing abyss of unknown day and night?

And changing still
With thoughts of past and present all confused,
And old desires now stronger grown
And new desires straining their wings unused,
He rose, and from the hill
Averted, looked again down
Towards the smoky signals of the town.
—"Man was not meant to live in that distress
Of other lives, abused
By others' thoughts that press
With wasted undergrowth of weed and thorn
And fungus in the mind's marish darkness born.

" Who in this dusty whirl shall know
His own thought from another's, or preserve
Unsullied yet the spiritual glow
Of inward light ? The thousand voices cry,
The thousand clamours tap upon every nerve,
In the same shackles thousand thousand go
The same path, nor may pause nor swerve.
Spirits like bodies brush thick-thronging by
In desperate machine of myriad parts :
Mind against mind, heart against hearts
Perpetually ground,
Moving half-senseless to an unknown bound.

" But in the lonely land
I have dreamed of and in dream explored,
Isled far in time and space as in salt sand,
Where the ringed hills stand
Or kneel and from their breasts are rivers outpoured
Into one wide and tropic-nourishing lake ;
There have I heard thee shake
With one deep breath, bright Spirit, the waters far and near,
And seen the ripples build and break
And build again thine image clear,
And thyself rising thence to take
Joy in a universe newly awake.

" Then has the dusk world glowed with thee
As with another sun,
Old time was ended, new begun :
Stepped I from prison free.
In the cool, silent meadows have I run
Shaking thy rains and globèd dews from me,
Spirit and body one,
And drinking deep airs of eternity.

And fresh delight has spun
Her moist gemm'd webs from every brake and tree,
While mortal ill was drowned beneath the huge sea
With wrongs done and undone.

" O thou pure Spirit rising out of earth,
Or visiting us from heaven, or the birth
Of marriage heaven and earth between ;
In mist still dimmed
From vision unaccustomed nor serene,
And seldom and not rightly prayed or hymned :—
Thee in thy flying shadow now I trace,
Or briefly and entranced stare on thy face,
Save in such heavenly instant yet unseen ;
And thee in wing-like brightness
Beholding, I have loved and from this mean embrace
Escaped, I would run after thee with new lightness."

Appearing and disappearing as a shade
Dappling the windy pasture, man's life flies . . .
And he must disappear, his shadow fade,
Or move incognizable and noteless ever ;
Must lose himself to find himself, where eyes
Of timorous men fall never,
Remote as east and west from their endeavour.
And the soft, long-delicious ties,
The old and tender-tangled intimacies,
Once rudely broken would remain for ever broken,
And even memory hush at length her sighs,
And wounds heal gently or their sharpness be unspoken.

Thenceforth for many days
He pondered blest escape—on many ways
Hesitated, concealing from the eyes of home

The need and passion that had come
Fiery upon him, burning fierier for delays:
How men disappear, pretending suicide,
And others leaving nothing that betrays,
Deep in some noisy haunt to hide,
Tossed seen yet unseen on man's loaded tide.
. . . But that were another death.—To wander then
Where few and simple men,
Or in some distant hamlet dwell laborious, unespy'd?

So in a secret channel to flow on,
Holding those heavenly beacons in his breast
That now obscurely and intermitted shone;
Or in some untraditioned earth
Seek a new birth—
No matter, so in quietness end his quest
And there himself he find
At last, this mortal sickness gone. . . .
"Choose, choose!" his need cried, "or the blind
Herd-pressure will subdue you quite."
And "Choose!" hung echoing in his mind
Ceaseless, while hasty dreams perplexed the night.

If a misgiving came that cruelty
Would in his silent disappearance lie,
That other hearts would be consumed with care
While his, released
And happy being at length solitary,
Sought the long-clouded spiritual East;
Or if from the quiet body that lay sleeping there,
Close by his own, crept now a tongueless cry
Astonished, with its "Where, O where!"
And now the soft reproach of a dreamed sigh;
The misery of misgiving was half-annulled

And dear reproach in his own heart's cry dulled.

—Until, when morning broke, returned the pain
Of giving pain for love.
But so love's paid, and love for love again
Scarce given without alloy.
Pity that the belovèd should remove
While love yet follows after with hot foot
Finding in grief alone her joy.
He with another wordless passion burned;
She hung for him love's rich and wasting fruit;
While he nor changed nor turned
But gentler grew; and to the last hour was mute
Even while he watching yearned.

When the hour came he was as one awaking
After long sleep into a world all new,
With clear wet light upon the hill-slope breaking.
Without betrayal of his thought he drew
Each bolt that shut his life in others' keeping;
So, the years' dust light-shaking,
Soft and unfeigning and unmarked leapt through
The close crowd inly sleeping,
Inly content. He passed, and not a stain
Of yesterday fell on him, and no pain
Save such barbless grief
As takes from time its needed light relief.

. . . . .

When the hour passed she unawakened stood
And wandered round with sharp affrighted stare.
Sorrow with wonder warred and checked her blood;
She hung a still pool in that freezing air.
She sighed in strange and loathèd solitude;
Crept from her heart a tongueless "Where, O where!"—
Remembering his so long changeful mood,

And late the fixity so rare.
Wildly did she brood
Equal on likely and unlikely things,
Knowing not one from other, ill from good,
With daily new fear salting hope's diminished springs.

Poor baffled mind was hers!
She could not of his mind's dark sorrows dream.
From ambushed thought no spiny barb might pierce
Her breast, nor cloud obscure her spirit's beam.
The mind's unease
She knew not, and the world was what it did seem—
A space of towns and neighbours, summer hills and seas,
Human simplicities,
And kindness in a rim of narrow girth.
She knew not that to him the world was stale
As to a vigorous plant sick dusty earth,
Nor how time's mortal candle glimmered pale.

If it were body's sickness, or mischance
Of crowded street, or shame
Or fear of shame, or threat of poverty,
The news had surely lit her ignorance
Even with dismaying flame.
But no news came,
Only false hopes flared up deceivingly
And startled her and died,
Leaving her thoughtless with blind circumstance,
Except that in her breast the mother cried,
"Had I not childless been,
Never this widow'd autumn had I seen."

It was one night when she but waking slept,
Her thoughts a-tiptoe lest he enter in

With the wild clouded dreams that round her swept ;
It was one night that like a sudden shower
He came and pierced her earth, and sank within
And round the starved roots crept.
So spring renewed her hasty flower ;
Shook in that rain old memories, as the grasses
Shake when the wind passes
Lightly in its hour ;
And bird-like joys outleapt
From naked thorn that changed to nesting bower.

She saw him as in earlier days she'd seen,
Wandering along a valley green,
Leaving her in the hamlet well content.
She waved, he answered ; then she watched him rise
Where the steep path went
Seeking the neighbourhood of moving skies.
A turn, and then no more ; the hill
Rose, and he with it, though she saw him not.
Turning, she nursed the mere fond thought
Of him upclimbing still :—
How well satisfied
To wait, 'neath the hillside !

After few days he had returned renewed
By brief aërial solitude,
Her happiness enlarging in his peace
With thoughtless, swift increase.
And though the distant landscape of her spirit was blurred
By time, as the remoter heights by summer rain,
Now in the wind of sleep the mist was stirred
By his return again and again and again.
Clear moved he in nocturnal light and clear she heard
Forgotten speech reawakened in her brain ;

As near, as clear as a singing, fluttering bird
Outside an unflawed window pane.

And swept back now the time when but his shape
Lay here, the spirit gone
Many long days in wandering escape
From the poor body's sick distress
Sleeping unrested and unconscious on,
While she had watched, patient and passionless,
Till his returning spirit was reconciled
In its old house and that disease was flown.
He had returned ; and now in sleep she smiled,
" Here, here ! " as if upon her breast
Again his head might rest
Returned from desert journeys wild.

O, in such sweetness woke she then as made
Her bosom rise.
She looked : her bosom sank, her eyelids weighed
On undeluded eyes,
And " Here ! " gave place again to " Where, O where ! "
—" Yet it was he though not his body drew
Near, and all the night through
Held me in intermingling spiritual and dear,
Defeating time and space."
So between sleep and wake and " Where " and " Here "
Awhile she lay in that resumed embrace,
Then rose and felt his breath yet warm upon her face.

In my ears it grew,
  Sound of joyous laughter,
Echo of plunging rivers
  Flying a rainbow after,
And long-breathed notes
  Of wind through deep caves,
With singing of bent pines
  When the torn west raves,
And those long trembling chords
  Of falling waves ;
Of all these it grew,
Then sighed, as a willow
  That air and water laves.

And a likeness was wrought
That cleared as I gazed.
  Of Jonathan a look I caught
Who died in his spring ;
  Solomon, his brow so wide,
Beard heavy, tawny hands,
  Solomon in his pride ;
And Hector who 'neath Troy—
  Ev'n Hector—had died ;
And Roland who to Echo's
  Far, fainter horn replied ;
And the Black Prince that *Réveillé,*
  Réveillé ! cried ;
And Sidney, with grave Honour
  Stooped at his side ;
And Wolfe, lonely and beautiful
  Yet, as he died ;
And Nelson, azure bright,
With stars and beams bedight . . .

A music, a brightness,
  Grew upon the air,
Shape plain as mountain's crest,
  Sound like seamew's clear ;
Came it whence ? and passed
  Whither—and Why ?
Fading, brightening, changing
  Like a cloud in the sky.

Even as dreams shine
  When stares a child upon
Marvels no elder knows,
  So splendour shone ;
And even so my lids
  Drooped that I might stay
Awhile the shape of first delight
  Upon the breast of day.

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